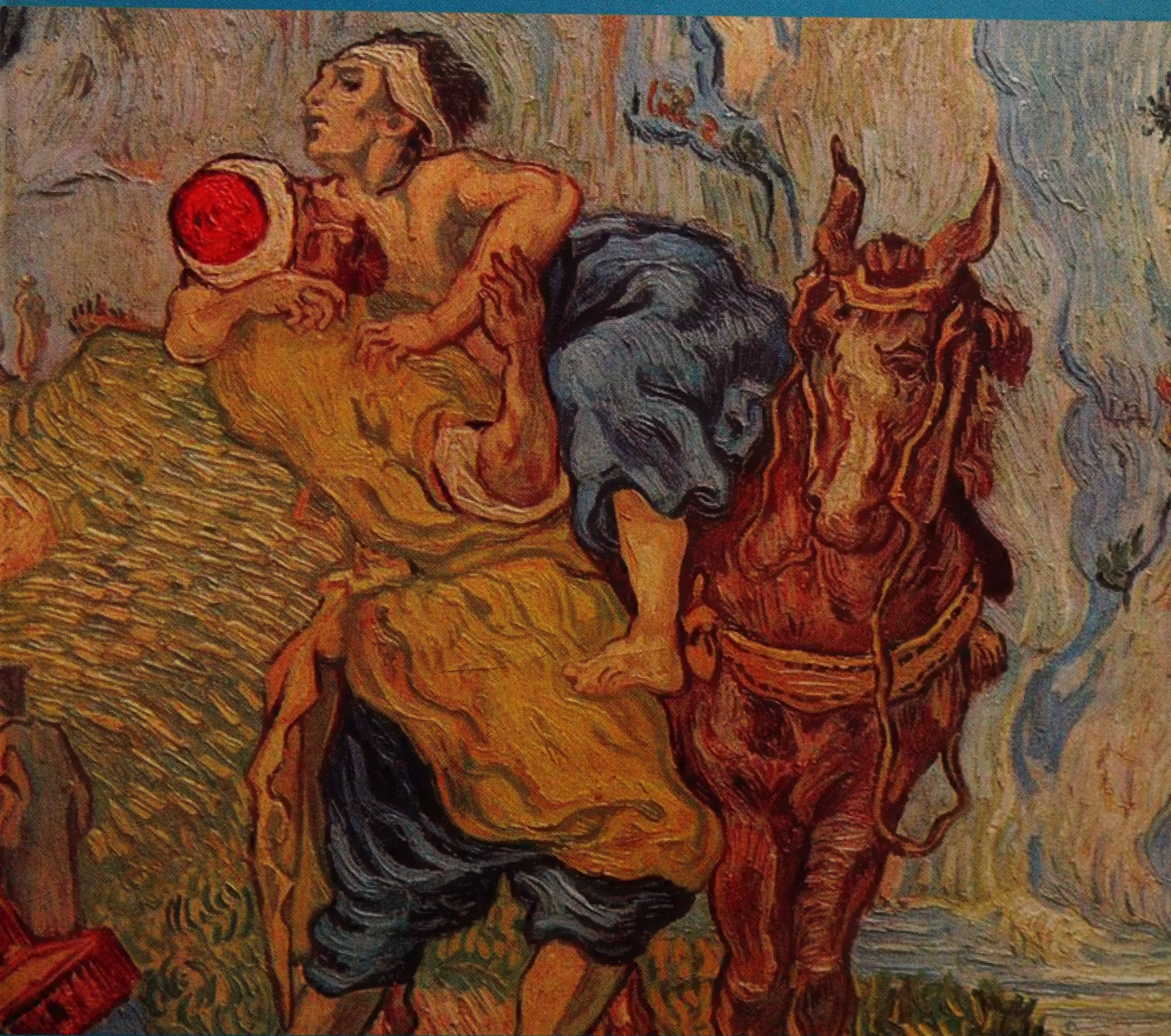


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Volume 36 Issue 1 Fall 2015



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MERCY

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Human Development Magazine is a quarterly publication for people involved in the work of fostering the growth of others. This includes persons involved in religious leadership and formation, spiritual direction, pastoral care and education interested in the development of the whole person.

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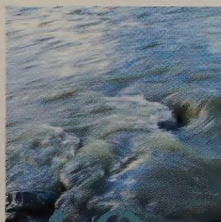
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OPENING THE "DOOR OF MERCY"

Fall 2015

Dear Friends:

As we stand on the threshold of the opening of the "Door of Mercy" at St. Peter's in Rome and in all the dioceses of the world, we thought it appropriate to dedicate this issue to the theme of mercy. Our cover presents the Good Samaritan by Vincent Van Gogh. Painted just a few months before his untimely and tragic death in 1890, it is something of a "homage" to his brother Theo who literally "carried" Vincent through his many psychological and financial troubles. Van Gogh painted himself in the place of the Good Samaritan and the face of the victim is that of his brother Theo; in other words, something of a role reversal." Vincent is helping his brother but yet it is more often the other way around! The image reminds us, therefore, that true mercy must always be interactive, both given and received. Every one of us stands in need of mercy and every person is also capable of showing mercy toward others.

When the dynamics of mercy extended and received, we need to remember that in the larger picture all mercy begins with God. He is indeed "rich in mercy and compassion." Throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, God was frequently acknowledged as a God of mercy and compassion. In the New Testament the mystery of God's mercy took human flesh, even to the point of the way Jesus died, as the perfect embodiment of God's compassion.

There is a certain "flow" to the dynamism of mercy, from God to us and then through us to others. We can sometimes take for granted God's compassion and mercy for our own regard and thereby fail to pass along the gift we have received; we see this all too frequent reality played out in the parable of the servant who was forgiven a great debt but would not forgive his fellow servant a minor debt (Matthew 18:21-35). All of our essays in this issue speak to this theme of the "flowing" mercy. Sister Janet Ruffing, OFM, and Father Kevin Tortorelli, OFM, are very explicit about the need to accept and celebrate God's mercy so that we will know how to share it with others. In different ways, both of these articles challenge us to recognize the many ways that we can block the flow of God's mercy through us and through us by our own fears or addictions.

Fr. Howard Gray, SJ, reminds us that mercy is indeed another name for God." Not only does God reach out toward us in merciful ways; God simply is mercy itself. Sharing this insight, Fr. Gray is building on themes from Cardinal Kasper's book on Mercy, a text which the Pope gave to the future Pope Francis on their way to the Conclave. As Monsignor John Strykowski of

Brooklyn, New York notes in his review of Kasper's work, the newly elected Pope in his first Sunday Angelus referred by name to this same book and encouraged all to read it.

Mercy has certainly been a major theme of the Pontificate of Pope Francis – not only in word but in deed. His motto, based on Matthew 9, itself proclaims mercy: "Choosing and being merciful" (*Miserando Atque Eligendo*). Who of us can forget his embrace of the man covered with sores on the Island of Lampedusa? Time and again Pope Francis has surprised us with gestures of mercy, the witness of humble lifestyle and reaching out to all on the "peripheries" of life. In his essay, Father Jim Harbaugh, SJ, quotes from Pope Francis in *Joy of the Gospel* in which he specifically identifies with all who are afflicted and in need of mercy, including those dealing with addictions. Fr. Harbaugh draws beautiful applications between the 12 steps of Alcoholics' Anonymous and the process of accepting, being transformed and freed by mercy.

We are delighted to include in this issue a few shorter essays that also offer perspectives on mercy. Brother Ed Phalen of the LaSalle family in New York City shares with us lessons he learned from his father, a New York City policeman in the '50s; his reflections are extremely relevant given the contemporary tension between law enforcement and people from minority groups. He makes the simple but timeless observation that everything boils down to one word: relationship!

Detroit seminarian Grayson Heenan, currently a student at the North American College in Rome, shares his own experience of coming to new insight into being an instrument of God's mercy from his year of service with "Heart's Home" in Argentina. Father Tom Florek, SJ, tells a story of Hispanic families in Indiana who – precisely by "letting go" – were able to reclaim the space that had once been taken from them. Truly, there is a cycle and rhythm to mercy!

We are always open to new articles and suggestions and we thank you for making Human Development a part of your own life and ministry. It is our hope and prayer that through the providence of God at work in the visit of Pope Francis to the United States and the World Synod of Bishops, that each of us might discover what Thomas Merton spoke of as "Mercy within mercy within mercy."

Your brother in the Lord,

Msgr. John P. Zeng

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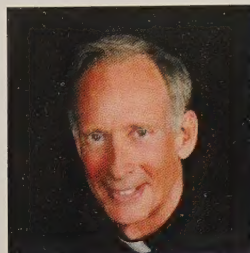


Be merciful as your Heavenly Father is merciful.”

-Luke 6:36



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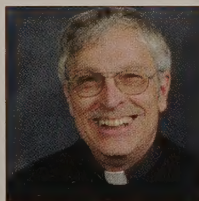
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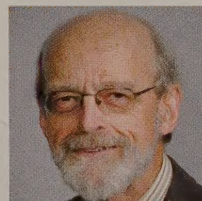
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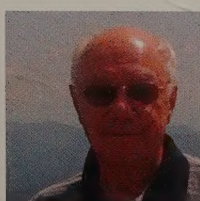
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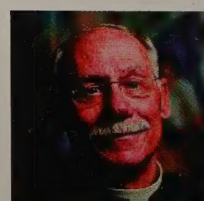
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Bea comes to us from Little Falls, MN where she ministers as Community Minister/President of the Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls, MN.

Bea has served in a variety of ministries – dietetics, secondary education, pastoral psychotherapy, congregational leadership, administration of her Order's health system, and as a consultant specializing in religious congregation events and health care sponsorship.

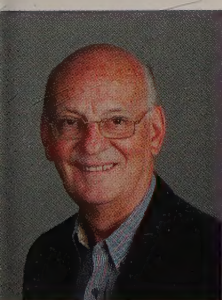
Bea served as Community Minister for her congregation, the Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls, MN from 2001 – 2006, and is currently serving again from 2011 – 2018. She was a member of the Presidency for the Leadership Conference of Women Religions from 2004 – 2006.

Bea has a Bachelor of Science degree in Foods and Nutrition and a B.S. in Home Economics Education from the College of St. Teresa, Winona, MN. She has a Masters in Pastoral Studies/Counseling from Loyola University, Chicago, IL and a clinical internship at Parkside Pastoral Counseling Center, Park Ridge, IL. She is a certified fellow (retired) of the American Association of Pastoral Counselors.



BROTHER LOUGHLAN SOFIELD

Brother Sofield, a Missionary Servant of the Most Holy Trinity, was Senior Editor of Human Development for thirty-three years. He has worked in over 300 dioceses on six continents, as well as with numerous religious congregations. His major focus is the wedding of ministry and psychology.



TONY GITTINS, CSSP

Father Anthony Gittins, a member of the Congregation of the Holy Ghost, taught Theology and Anthropology at The Catholic Theological Union in Chicago from 1984 until 2011. He held the Bishop Ford Chair of Mission Theology between 1999 and 2008, and is now Emeritus Professor of Theology and Culture.

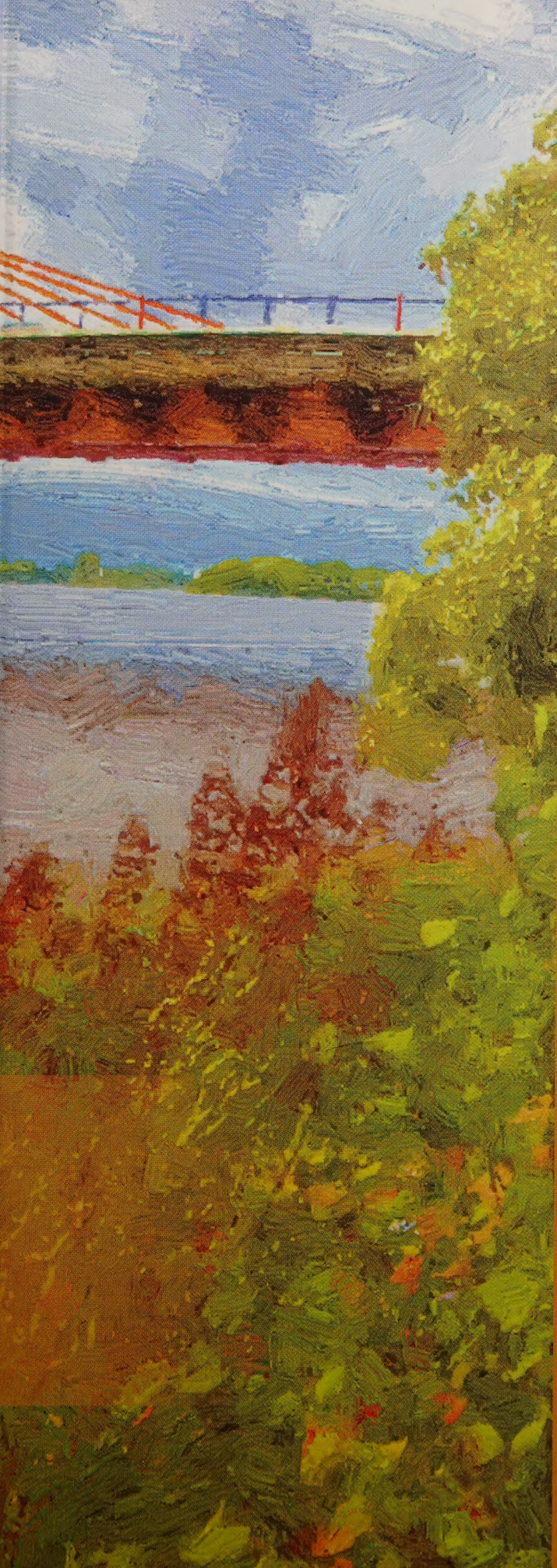
Born in Manchester (England), and ordained in 1967, after completing his theological studies in Theoretical Linguistics and attaining a doctorate of Social Anthropology, he worked in Africa, and pursued post-doctoral research at Oxford and Cambridge.

He continues to offer workshops, seminars, and retreats in more than thirty-five countries from Africa to the Pacific. For almost thirty years he has worked with and among homeless women on the streets of Chicago and now serves in a soup kitchen. He has an adopted, multi-ethnic family: a daughter (and her husband), four grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren.



MERCY: ANOTHER NAME FOR GOD

-Father Howard Gray, S.J.



DOES GOD SHOW MERCY OR IS GOD MERCY ITSELF?

Let me lay out at the outset that in composing this article I was distracted by the exchange between Walter Cardinal Kasper and Monsignor Daniel P. Moloney of the Archdiocese of Boston. The exchange can be found in the journal *First Things* for March 2015. Basically the argument is whether the Cardinal has written with theological precision about the mercy of God. The core of the dispute, perhaps simplistically stated is this: is it more accurate to say God IS mercy or God SHOWS mercy? My theological instincts lie with the Cardinal, feeling that Monsignor Moloney has read the Cardinal's reflections in *Mercy, The Essence of the Gospel and the Key to Christian Life*, with little sympathy for the pastoral approach that the Cardinal has attempted to detail. Frankly, I wasted too much reflection time on the argument and realized in a graced moment of textual discernment that all the debate was, for me, a distraction from the tone and ultimate direction that I really wanted to take in forming this essay. Consequently, let me acknowledge that there are theological disputes on how one wants to assign mercy as an identifying feature of God but I am setting these to one side. Thus, this is an essay on how I see God working as a merciful God. And for me God's actions witness or reveal God's merciful personality.

Such an approach is, I suppose, primarily pastoral, though I feel with John O'Malley and other Church historians that Vatican II placed pastoral theology as an essential prism for all theology; that is, that speculation, systematics, and all research about God must, in the final analysis, lead to the human events that God cares about (cf. Exodus 3:1-12). And "God's cares" are best laid out in the actions of Jesus. The gospels reveal God's priorities in Jesus' stories and teaching; Jesus' story, the revelation of God, portrays again and again the encounter between need and love. Human needs are many, of course, for love and understanding, for forgiveness and the power to forgive, for friendship and tolerance, for apostolic engagement and for contemplative stillness, and on and on. For the human heart is restless and oriented by a desire for that rest that finally only God can give. Jesus reached out to this restless human heart. Now let me turn to mercy and as an instance of this restless search for God.

Mercy is a special kind of human and divine response, one of those spectacular instances where both men and women and God mirror similar attributes of love-in-action. Sometimes Scripture portrays God acting despite human perversity and meanness (e.g., again Exodus 3) and sometimes Scripture portrays God as working through human generosity of spirit and radical availability to the other (e.g., The Book of Ruth). All this intermingling between human selfishness and human generosity has been compellingly laid out in Luke 10:25-37, the parable of the Good Samaritan. I have employed Luke's story in many contexts; the context that meant the most to me was when I employed the parable to summarize my understanding of ministry in the Church.

THE FOUR MOMENTS OF THE COMPASSION OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN

Succinctly put, what I underscore is that the fourfold action of the Samaritan in the narrative encapsulates the four constitutive elements of authentic Christian service. First, unlike the priest and the Levite in the story, the Samaritan sees what is really there. Second, the Samaritan allows his heart to be touched profoundly by identifying with the nameless victim on the road. Third, the



Samaritan uses what he has to care for the victim on the road. The detailed description of what the Samaritan does underscores the concreteness of genuine Christian response. Fourth, the Samaritan sustains the good he has begun by enlisting the inn-keeper to care for the recovering victim on the road, promising both recompense for what has been spent in that recovery period and also that he will return to confirm that the inn-keeper has kept his part of the recovery bargain. These four elements in the parable constitute ministry in the Church: contemplative seeing, affective response, practical service of the other, and engaging another to sustain a good work. Formation for ministry in the Church would obviously also follow these "four moments." None of the four can be omitted; they represent an essential quartet of graced cooperation with divine mercy.

The conclusion of the Lucan account is brilliant: "Which of these three [Samaritan or priest or Levite], do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise." Jesus has moved the lawyer from the world of speculation, "And who



es my neighbor?" to the world of concrete action,
for which the lawyer himself has to provide the
conclusion: the Samaritan is a person of mercy. As
Pope Francis has been insisting in almost all his
talks, address, and homilies, such is the meaning of
ministry: to be personally involved in helping the
neighbor; perhaps better, in creating a relationship
with the neighbor.

What I have offered here is a summary statement of
mercy as a significant revelation of God's presence
among us; that is, that God acts as a merciful
presence either directly as in the story of Moses and
the apparition of the burning bush or indirectly
as in the story of Ruth and Naomi. However, for
Christians the climactic revelation of God's mercy
becomes incarnate in the person and ministry of
Jesus. And one of the privileged moments of Jesus
as the living proclamation of God's mercy is in the
setting and narration of the Good Samaritan which
teaches us how "to do mercy."

Theological reflection on mercy characterizes at
least three verbal descriptions of mercy in Scripture.
First, mercy is presented as *hesed*, which represents
a wide-range of meaning but essentially a covenant

These four elements
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love, particularly between God and his chosen people (Exodus 20:6). Second, mercy is translated as *rahamim*, which Julia Upton, RSM identifies as “a nurturing womb,” a physical movement that “originates at the center of one’s body.” A third Hebrew word used for mercy is *hen/hanan*, translated as grace or favor (cf. Upton’s “Mercy” in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, edited by Michael Downey).

Jesus was faithful to the Jewish values that He inherited and also brought these values to a deeper level of divine human communion and availability which shattered boundaries of race, religion, and social class. For Jesus, at one and the same time, mercy was a radical witness both to his divine sonship and to his human concern for all his brothers and sisters. Jesus reveals both who God is and what it is to be truly human: “Be merciful just as your heavenly Father is merciful” (Lk 6:36).

We possess texts galore on mercy; but the most profound insights into God’s mercy come, I believe, when we can trace the geography of mercy in our own spiritual or religious journey. This is what I want to offer in the body of this essay. I hope that this narration of my own experience of God’s mercy will, in turn, prompt readers to engage their own experiences of God working mercifully in their own lives.

BEING COMPASSIONATE TOWARD ANOTHER OPENS THE DOOR TO OUR OWN NEED FOR COMPASSION

Not too long ago I was talking with a young professional about his search for God and for ways to deepen his relationship with God. In the course of our conversation this young man acknowledged his struggles with addiction. In a moment of painful confession he said simply, “I’m a broken person.” And I spontaneously replied, “We’re all broken people.” We went on from this moment, a mutual acknowledgment of our own brokenness, to his personal search for that healing only God can give.

As this young professional laid out his own struggles and insights and great hopes for sobriety, we laid the foundation for our ongoing spiritual

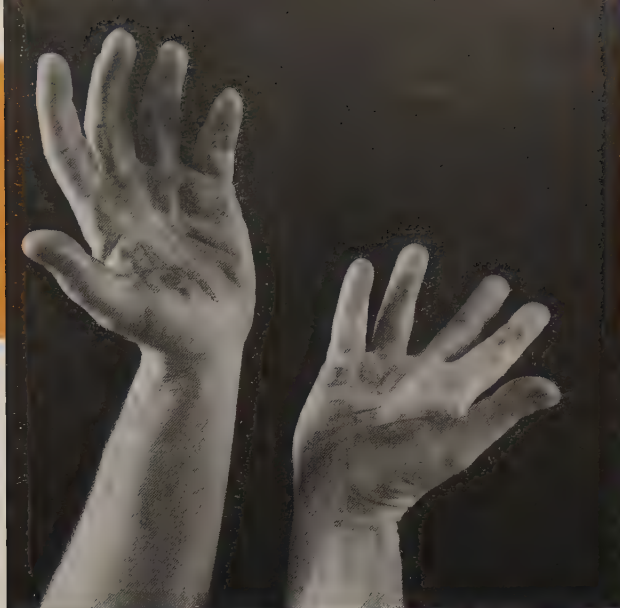
conversations, employing the Ignatian retreat experience as our common ground. But while I have been accompanying this young man, I have also pursued that moment when I simply said, “We’re all broken people.” I realized immediately that my acknowledgement could not be reduced simply to pastoral sympathy or to a facile rhetorical piety. It came from a deeper realization that anything I did that was really enduringly from God also emerged out of my own weakness and frailty. I guess that I have experienced this before but never with the concomitant assurance that God was telling me something new and important. My young friend had occasioned a graced restlessness in me about my own concomitant need for mercy.

For a while that was all that I had to go on, a moment that struck a chord in my soul. I gradually came to recognize that stirring as God’s presence, a gift of affective insight that needed still better refinement and internal articulation. That better articulation came to me as I worked at another project which prompted me to peruse past Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America. As I went through the proceedings from 2000 to 2015, I ran across James Kennan’s excellent 2009, “Impasse and Solidarity in Theological Ethics” and the equally fine “Response to Jim Kennan” by David Cloutier. Both pieces proved important steps in my personal assertion that “We’re all broken people.”

LIVING WITH OUR OWN SUFFERING CAN UNITE US WITH OTHERS IN THEIR SUFFERING

Kennan began his reflections with an analysis of his own sense of isolation - geographic and psychological - as he began a professional labor in the Philippines and also grappled with a diagnosis of cancer. Kennan’s self-reflection in coping with this isolation led to an insight at once personal to his own spiritual pilgrimage but also professional relating to his work in ethics. Kennan puts his resolution this way: I know that many, many here have had similar experiences of (William James’) the sick soul: whether from diseases, alcoholism, drug addiction, betrayal, censure, and job loss, the death of a spouse, child, or loved one. I am





deliberately trying to tap into your experiences of the sick soul as well, because I think the key to advancing solidarity in the face of impasse is the ability to live cognitively, emotionally, and spiritually with one's own suffering while being in union with others' in theirs. We know the healing power of solidarity and we can talk about it from our own experience. We know, or at least I believe, we stand in solidarity with others who face impasse precisely because we have faced our own. We enter solidarity, then, not from a condescending position of strength but from the vulnerable position of being human (CTSA Proceedings 64/2009, 49-50).

Kennan ends his reflections with a quotation from his Boston College colleague, Lisa Cahill, which underscores his own analysis of the importance of suffering in solidarity: Cahill asserts that moral truth "corresponds to the reality of human interdependence and to the possibility of our being in solidarity with one another to relieve human suffering" (cf. Proceedings, 2009, 60).

DEEPER INTO SOLIDARITY THROUGH VULNERABILITY

In his "Response to Jim Keenan," David Cloutier draws on the work of Jean Vanier, "who founded in 1964 L'Arche, an international federation of communities spread over twenty-five countries, for people with developmental disabilities and those who assist them." Cloutier uses the L'Arche experience to deepen Kennan's argument about the power of solidarity in suffering but Cloutier

also emphasizes an aspect of that solidarity which especially helped me in my effort to unpack my spontaneous, "We're all broken."

Cloutier deepens Keenan's insights on solidarity and human suffering with his own experience of L'Arche:

People come to L'Arche to help the poor, but instead discover that they are the poor. We are prone to hide our suffering, but one of the gifts that L'Arche core members give is that this strategy of evasions is unavailable to them. Their directness and vulnerability quite immediately invites visitors to give up their middle-class defense and become vulnerable themselves. Thus, solidarity happens. (Proceedings 2009, 63).

As providence often maneuvers us into more and more insight, consequently, shortly after my discovery and subsequent reflection on Kennan's and Cloutier's essays, I participated in the funeral liturgy of the brother of a fellow Jesuit, a man who had suffered long and courageously with cancer and also someone who had volunteered to work at the Washington, D.C. L'Arche center. His liturgy was populated with L'Arche folks who clearly loved and admired this man who had, undeniably, become one with them. The L'Arche community showed solidarity in their grief but also in their palpably joyful hope that one day they would be united with their friend. Tears and quiet laughter were their gifts of blessed mourning.

At the time of this funeral, I had agreed to write this present essay and found the whole process a great gift because it forced me to pause and pray and then to pursue the meaning of God's mercy beyond a conventional presentation of God's care. For beyond linguistic exegesis and theological argument our pastoral identity and service have to trigger our personal exploration and to inspire

Mercy is the grace of participating in God's compassion, forgiveness, involvement, or more simply an experience of God-with-us. Mercy is solidarity with the divine and the human.

reverent surrender to mercy as God's loving care for people wherever they are. In other words, mercy is the grace of participating in God's compassion, forgiveness, involvement, or more simply an experience of God-with-us. Mercy is solidarity with the divine and the human. Thus my search had climaxed in my own appreciation of the connection between mercy and solidarity.

MERCY AS PARTICIPATION IN GOD'S SAVING, HEALING LOVE FOR SELF AND OTHER

Let me pause here to underscore the importance of the term solidarity. Roberto Goizueta writes that solidarity "refers to the emphatic foundation of God's love. . . The call to solidarity is a call to affirm in one's life the interdependence and unity of humankind before God; what happens to one happens to all" ("Solidarity" in the *New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, ed. Michael Downey [Collegeville, Newman Press, 1993] 906). Consequently, solidarity is a moral virtue that inspires action for the common good and founds the social justice which is part of Christian life. To be a Christian is to be in solidarity.

But solidarity is also an invitation, a graced call, to union with God in God's love for people wherever they are. My spontaneous assertion "We're all broken people" became a pilgrimage to rediscover mercy as participation, an alliance, a covenant, if you will, with the action of God. Thus from the transcendent mystery of God in the epiphany of the burning bush, "I am who am" emerges the God who is with God's people. "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob," the God of history past and the God of the present, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt" (cf. Exodus 3:1-7). This is the Hebrew religious identity of Jesus. Solidarity

molded his heart and defined his ministry, "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Matt. 9:36).

My experience incorporated me into the divine/human solidarity that was also the summons offered in the opening words of the great Vatican II charter *Gaudium et Spes* (The Church in the Modern World), paraphrased: The joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the people of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ as well. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts.

We can study mercy, listen to and think that we understand the refrain that calls us to mercy in every liturgy just before we move into the moment of Eucharistic communion, "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." But it is the the rush of grace that leads us into the harmony of saying and doing, of understanding and embracing as our own possession that makes mercy into its twin virtue, solidarity.

CREATING THE SOLIDARITY

The grace of insight or what John Cardinal Newman characterized as the distinction between notional and real assent, must morph into action. By "action" I do not mean simply activity but rather moral and spiritual commitment-in-deeds. How do we "do" the merciful deed? Here I want to return to the parable of the Good Samaritan and develop further the four points I outlined earlier in this essay: the ability to see, the ability to feel compassion, the ability to engage in deeds that help, and the ability to create an enduring culture of mercy. I use the word "ability," understanding that

Our solidarity with Christ as stewards of His mercy begins with conversion toward seeing what is truly in front of us. Our first task as stewards of mercy is not to judge but to see all aspects that lie open before us and to refrain from immediate judgment. This kind of engaged seeing is a contemplative act.

it is a vague term. Here I mean ability as a human capability touched by God; that is, a grace.

Mercy originates in an act of contemplative seeing. Note how often in the gospels Jesus is described as seeing - not simply looking at - but actually entering into the life of the other where he or she is, as he or she is. For example in Luke 7: 11-17 as Jesus approaches the gate of the town of Naim, he encounters a funeral procession, for the only son of a widowed mother. Luke describes the scene in these words, "When the Lord saw her, he had compassion for her and said to her, 'Do not weep.'" He restored the young man to life and "gave him to his mother."

At the end of that same seventh chapter of Luke, Jesus confronts Simon the Pharisee with his failure as a host and his deeper failure in simply dismissing the penitent woman as a public sinner. Jesus confronted Simon, "Do you see this woman?" (Lk 7:44). Jesus forces Simon to see what he had chosen not to see: he contrasts all that Simon failed to do for Jesus his invited guest and all that the woman had done for Jesus. All that Simon saw was sin whereas Jesus saw repentance and gratitude.

SEEING WITH JESUS: STEP 1

Our solidarity with Christ as stewards of His mercy begins with conversion toward seeing what is truly in front of us. Our first task as stewards of mercy is not to judge but to see all aspects that lie open before us and to refrain from immediate judgment. This kind of engaged seeing is a contemplative act. By a contemplative act I do not mean that we withdraw from life but that we engage life all the more intently. From my experience people often speak all too glibly of "finding God in all things." The phrase is beautiful but it does not mean skipping over unpleasant and inconvenient truths to impose our interpretation on what is present before us. Let me put it starkly. You cannot find God in all things if you do not find all things in all things. Education is a process that should teach us how to see—whether it is a poem, a scientific experiment, sociological data, or the people with whom we rub elbows. In the life of the Spirit and in the stewardship of mercy we simply must learn to slow down in order to see, to pay attention to the

reality God has placed before us.

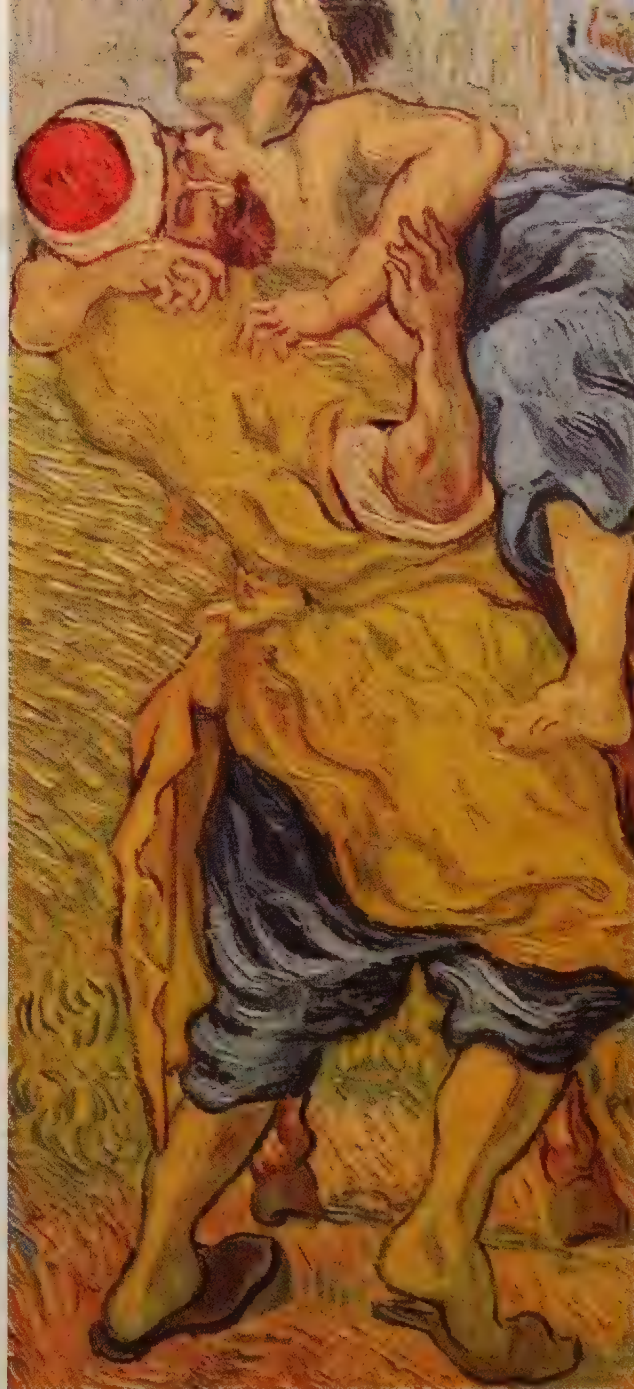
Pope Francis asks us to take time to practice such contemplative seeing: "In faith," he says, "Christ is not simply the one in whom we believe, the supreme manifestation of God's love; he is the one with whom we are united precisely in order to believe. Faith does not merely gaze at Jesus, but sees things as Jesus sees them, with his own eyes; it is participation in his way of seeing" cf. *Walking with Jesus* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2015, 3, taken from the encyclical *Lumen Fidei*, the Light of Faith).

Finally, the scene of the last judgment in Matthew 25:31-46 underscores the pivotal role of seeing within the practical opportunities God has presented us, to see Christ within the people who most need and deserve our undivided attention. Those who have learned to see are welcomed into the final solidarity with God, while those who did not see, have effectively blocked themselves from final solidarity with God and all He loves.

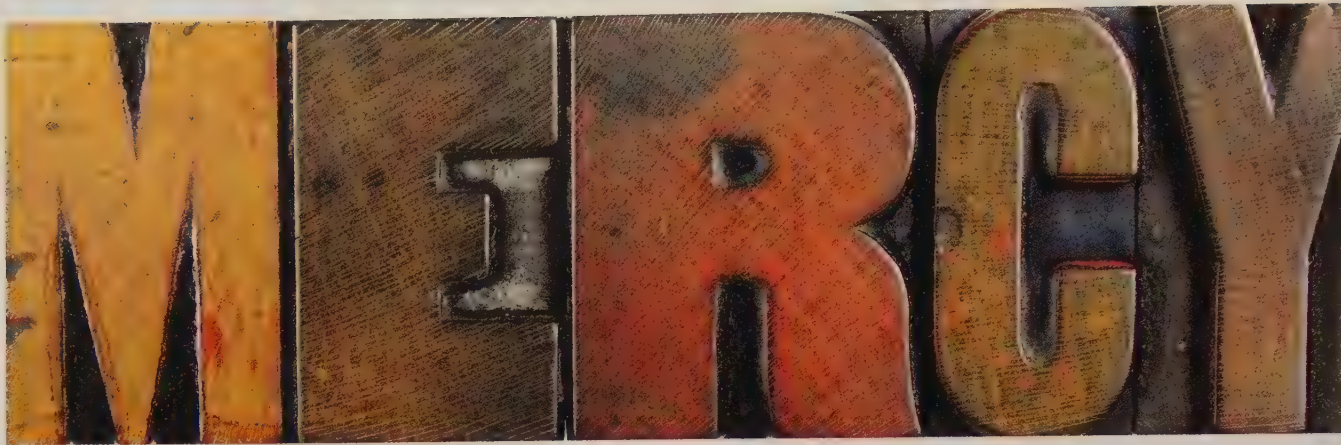
ALLOWING OUR VISION TO CHANGE US: STEP 2

The second stage of accepting the grace of mercy-stewardship emerges when contemplative seeing touches our hearts. The compassion of the Samaritan is a strong movement of care and involvement. It identifies with the stranger. It is the transformation from indifference to involvement, the moment when the inconvenient stranger becomes a "real" person. Can we mandate compassion? Can we ask people to assume an ethical posture of teaching their hearts to be touched? It is a lifelong process beginning. We model this gift from generation to generation; compassion needs educational moments, e.g., immersion experiences which change both the mentor and the student.

Jesus' compassion broke boundaries, extending itself to the self-righteous and to the seemingly unrighteous alike. His seeing always led to caring. In Luke 13:10-17, in the narrative of the woman in the bondage of Satan for eighteen long years, Jesus extends a compassion that liberates because He cares. Yes, he liberates the woman from her affliction but he also liberates her from being



a social outcast, from living on the boundaries of the community. He also liberates from the congregational legalism that saw the Sabbath as a time of restrictions rather than an occasion for mutual care and kindness. Finally, Jesus liberates the president of the synagogue from defining his "job" overseeing religious order to the privilege and responsibility of extending religious solidarity, "And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the Sabbath day?" (Lk. 13:16) Compassion is caring enough to reach out but it can also be caring enough to confront and to challenge.



CONCRETE ACTION: STEP 3

The third movement in living as stewards of mercy is self-evident. Contemplative seeing and empathetic response, if they ended the Christian's engagement, would be exemplary aesthetic experiences. But that is not mercy. Mercy is the movement that asks of us time, energy, talents, self-donation. In the parable of the Samaritan, Jesus details the Samaritan's involvement--detouring his journey, spending his money, extending his responsibility, making bandages of his clothing, pouring out his wine and oil to help as much as he can. Each of these practical steps is a moment when the stranger on the road becomes the neighbor, someone I claim by my involvement as my brother or sister.

In his reflection on the parable, Martin Luther King offered this interpretation. King said that the priest and the Levite asked, "If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?" But the Samaritan asked, "If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?" Mercy is led by solidarity with the other; withholding mercy is led by indifference toward the other.

ON-GOING COMMITMENT: STEP 4

Finally, the fourth movement in formation for mercy is represented by the way the Samaritan engages the innkeeper. The Samaritan sustains his act of mercy by generating a program of further care even in his absence. The innkeeper was promised money and assured that the Samaritan would check up on the recovering stranger when he returned. But we should not overlook the last,

important gesture of the Samaritan: he created a structure of sustained mercy even when he himself had to leave.

MERCY INCLUDES JUSTICE

The life-long, on-going "formation program" for becoming "stewards of mercy" can be outlined in the four actions of the Samaritan. A recurring question is what is the relationship between mercy and justice? Some would point out that Hebrew provides one word – *emeth* – for both justice and mercy. In other words, God is both tender, loving mercy and truth/justice.

On the relationship between justice and mercy Cardinal Kasper offers the following observation: "Mercy does not abolish justice, but fulfills it and exceeds it. Thomas can even say: justice without mercy is cruelty; mercy without justice is the mother of disintegration; therefore both must be bound together. Mercy is concerned not only with fair distribution of material goods. Mercy wants to do justice to the other in his or her unique personal dignity; it is a person-oriented, not a thing-oriented justice. Mercy brings it about that people 'meet one another in that value which is man himself, with the dignity that is proper to him.' Thus, according to a formulation of Pope John Paul II, it is capable 'of restoring man to himself.' It is in a certain sense the most perfect incarnation of justice" (Cardinal Kasper, *Mercy*, 178).

THE ON-GOING "ANSWER" TO THE QUESTION

The mercy of God has been revealed to us not just for our admiration but for our imitation. Every revelation of God's mercy calls us, each in our own way and each through our particular gifts, to stand in solidarity with God and with our brothers and sisters. Mercy is a mission from God to stand with Christ. In the choices we make to stand in such solidarity, we discover anew and with fresh awe the mercy that is God.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

How have I encountered the embrace of God's mercy in my own life experience: ...as a forgiving acceptance in reconciliation or prayer? ...as a surprising gift of generosity when I was in need?

Have I ever noticed the many times we call upon God's mercy in the liturgy? How could we make those invocations more meaningful and deliberate?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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MERCY IN ACTION

-Thomas Florek



Lake Station has been the home of many families from Mexico and Puerto Rico arriving there in waves beginning from the early twentieth century and supplying labor for the NW Indiana steel mills. Then during the 1950's many arrived there to escape the high costs of living in Chicago.

In the early 1960's, the Multicultural Hispanic community pooled their money and built a center for their religious celebrations, Catholic instruction and social services. El Centro San Francisco thrived for ten years. Then a new pastor closed the offsite parish center claiming that it was divisive and too protestant. During

the next twenty years the Center was used for storage and later rented out to a para military organization. Because of the parish hall's regular use for bingo, an income source, the large Hispanic community was struggling to find a place for their events.

It was during a very cold night in December 1992 in Lake Station that Pablo, Maria Elena, Macario, Trino, Juana and Carmen were completing the final night of the Novena in honor of Our Lady of Guadalupe praying for the reopening of the St. Francis Center. The growing number of families and their spiritual and social reality required

come type of setting for service. The request to reopen the Center had been presented to the parish council but without any results.

Then out of nowhere and without discussion, the maintenance man gave the St. Francis Center key to Macario. The caravan journey to the long closed building arrived with candles and flashlights in hand and whispers of new hope. The padlock came off and we entered into a place that in months was to be transformed into a vibrant community center.

All the parish organizations along with the pastor and bishop were invited by the Hispanic community to the re-inauguration of the St. Francis Center. The joyful celebration was a reversal. The Hispanic community at the margins invited the traditional parish and diocesan authorities to their reclaimed "home." This event reflects the pastoral movement from the margins to the center and back again grounded in the story of Jesus of Galilee. The many Marian apparitions repeat this same movement with similar actors: Rural children, farmers or "first nation" people receive a message of the nearness of God and a call to conversion which is to go downtown to the religious authorities in order to call them out again to the place of the poor.

Power flows from the place of the poor: the power to hope in the face of hopelessness and the power to be merciful, the power to serve others rather than pursuing self-interest, the power to walk the walk of the Christian narrative that transforms history from the place of the poor at the margins.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Fr. Tom Florek, S.J., a Chicago-Detroit Jesuit, is the founder of the Midwest Hispanic Leadership Center serving newcomer immigrants from Latin America. His studies at Loyola Chicago, JST-Berkeley and the CTU joined with his long term pastoral work regionally and nationally are now at the service of the development of a Hispanic-Latino minor studies and Hispanic Institute at the University of Detroit Mercy.



POPE FRANCIS:
“I THINK OF THE ADDICTED”
MERCY AND ADDICTION

- Jim Harbaugh, S.J

"It is essential to draw near to new forms of poverty and vulnerability, in which we are called to recognize the suffering Christ, even if this appears to bring us no tangible and immediate benefits. I think of the homeless, the addicted, refugees, indigenous peoples, the elderly who are increasingly isolated and abandoned, and many others. Migrants present a particular challenge for me, since I am the pastor of a Church without frontiers, a Church which considers herself mother to all". . . . *Pope Francis, The Joy of the Gospel, # 210*

I. ADDICTION AND RUTHLESSNESS

Some years ago I wrote an article for *Human Development* on the subject of Integrity and 12 Step Spirituality (Vol. 28, # 3: Fall, 2007, 29-35). In this issue, the subject of which is mercy, I would like to begin with a reflection from near the end of that article: "The cure of [the 12] Steps, I think, is compassion. Recovering persons are being asked imaginatively to put themselves into other people's hearts. And I agree with those moralists who consider compassion one of the great wellsprings of ethical thought and action, as it also is, with some qualifications, in Buddhism."

What I called "compassion" then I will speak of as "mercy" on this occasion. But even as, like Pope Francis in his proclamation of a year of mercy, I use this term, I would like it to be understood with the etymological nuances of "compassion." The roots of the word speak of joining (cum = with) someone in their suffering (passio = suffering). Indeed, I would like to use "mercy" with an eye to the two words for it that appear in the Christian Scriptures. Thus I am not using it as a translation of the Greek *eleeos*, which can connote a kindness done by a superior to an inferior, but as a translation of the less usual word *oiktirmos*, which literally means to say "Oy!," as a speaker of Yiddish might, with another person who says "Oy!" in the face of life's woes. In this version of "mercy," which is central to the Gospel of Luke, there is no class distinction between the giver and the receiver of mercy; both are subject to the same human griefs.

As I did in the previous article, I am especially interested in the insights into mercy and the lack of it that can, I think, be derived from a study of the addicted, both those actively practicing and those who are recovering, especially by means of a 12 Step process. To begin with, I think it can be stated without contradiction that few human beings seem to lack the quality of mercy like an active addict.

The clinician Terry Kellogg captured this addict ruthlessness some years ago when he made apt observation that addicts have their primary relationships with things, and only secondary, instrumental relationships with other people. An addict places primary importance on what the addict most desires—a substance, an experience, even another person, but a person fetishized at the expense of other people and even of the actual person who is the object of the sex and love addiction. In the case of a thing this is especially misshapen: the addict wants to spend time with, thinks about obsessively, craves to the exclusion of ordinary needs like food and sleep—a bottle. Or a syringe. Or a pill. In other words, a thing, an object. The addict believes that this thing meets all the addict's needs. And of course, to paraphrase a tart line from Boys in the Band, a primary relationship with a thing has obvious advantages: "you don't have to look your best" to spend loving time with a thing. A thing doesn't judge or criticize you. To an extent, it's fairly reliable; aside from the vexed question of tolerance, you know what you're going to get from a substance.

Just as addicts treat things as if they were people, they treat people as if they were things.

Another human being is perceived by the addict strictly in relation to what the addict craves: will this person help or hinder me in seeking and enjoying what I am addicted to? If the former, the addict will manipulate the person in order to get what the addict so badly wants. If the latter, the addict will bully the person, up to and including threats of and acts of violence, to get the person to stop blocking access to the needed thing. It goes without saying that an addict's statements or promises can only be fully understood in this light. "I love you" from an active addict may suggest an element of real affection, but what it fully means is "I hope and trust that you will understand my need enough to help me to satisfy it." For that matter, "I hate you" fully means "I want you to get out of the way of my great need."

THE ADDICT TRAPPED IN SELF

Among the human beings that the addict uses as a means to an end is the addict him/herself. Especially as the addiction deepens, most addicts find themselves coming to do, and to undergo, things that would have appalled them before the addiction took hold. Along with the satisfaction of the need comes a deepening sense of shame, which in its turn requires more use of the addictive substance to deaden the pain. This is why, as I said before, efforts to shame addicts back to mercy are redundant: addicts are already doing a masterful job of shaming themselves.

So addicts appear to be merciless, and specifically in the sense of mercy I am using here: they seem unable or unwilling to feel for

Just as addicts treat things as if they were people, they treat people as if they were things. Another human being is perceived by the addict strictly in relation to what the addict craves: will this person help or hinder me in seeking and enjoying what I am addicted to?



other people, or indeed for themselves. There is an utter failure to put oneself in the place of another, to feel the pain that one's addictive behavior is causing other people, even people who have shown the addict great kindness—spouses, parents, children. Curiously, this ruthlessness is usually accompanied by both enormous self-pity and enormous self-contempt. The shame addicts feel is so powerful that it paradoxically makes them highly resistant to any notion that their own choices have any connection to their misery. Other people must have done it to them, by what they have done or by what they have failed to do. Many addicts die furious because other people haven't done what the addicts believe would have relieved their suffering and finally satisfied them.

This failure of compassion, this mercilessness, shows up even in psychological tests of active addicts. Some years ago there was a study of active alcoholics in which they were administered a standard test of psychology, I believe the Minnesota Multi-phasic. The clinicians were trying to determine if there were co-occurring mental illnesses, and, if so, which ones were most common. Among men, the most common co-occurring diagnosis, to the tune of 17%, was sociopathy—antisocial personality disorder. The quality most prevalent among actively alcoholic men, in other words, was their inability to feel for other people, evidenced by amoral behavior. To paraphrase Kant, the core of ethical behavior

is to treat people as ends in themselves, not as means to some other goal; a person who routinely does the reverse, an active addict, will then register as deeply unmoral, ethically and psychologically, to the point of being diagnosable.

This study made two further points, only the second of which will be pursued here. The first finding was that the most common co-morbidity for women was depression. It would be interesting to speculate how much this difference in diagnosis is the result of cultural conditioning—women are typically discouraged from the kind of aggressive behavior that might be considered symptomatic of sociopathy in men. But I would rather focus on the second finding in the rest of this article: the MMPI was re-administered to those of the men who entered 12-Step recovery and who had remained in it for six months. In every case the diagnosis of sociopathy no longer applied; the condition had remitted. Or had these alcoholic men learned (or re-learned) something in recovery that changed their perceptions and their behaviors in a merciful direction?

II: TWELVE STEPS TOWARD COMPASSION

I believe that the process of the Steps can in fact be construed as a path shaped by mercy in the sense of "compassion." In arguing this I am repeating much of what I said in my previous article.

To demonstrate this let me begin with the first three Steps. The effect of these Steps, I would argue, is to move the alcoholic from fruitless self-pity to genuine self-compassion by opening the alcoholic to the possibility of a larger compassion at work in the world, a larger compassion that has much in common with the compassion for all sentient creatures that the Buddha experienced at his great moment of enlightenment.

As I mentioned before, addicts are greatly given to self-pity. In the first few pages of Smith Henderson's powerful novel, *Fourth of July Creek*, a social worker observes about one of his clients, a meth addict, that "The



mother collected unemployment but her full-time occupation was self-pity. (p. 4)” This is not self-compassion; as in this instance, self-pity serves only to keep the addict stuck in a circle of use and self-disgust. Step One offers a different take with its very first word—“We.” (It should be noted that this word is understood at the beginning of each of the 11 subsequent Steps as well.) In full the Step says “We admitted we were powerless over alcohol and that our lives had become unmanageable.” It is no longer a matter of fruitless and unrelenting self-pity. The addict is being invited to look up and look around.

If the compassion of Step One is embryonic, it assumes a much fuller form in the next two Steps. The alcoholic is not supposed to self-diagnose in Step One and then launch into a more vigorous effort at self-control. No. Steps Two and Three urge alcoholics to look elsewhere, either outside or very deep inside, for both for their next move. Step Two says: “[We] Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.” Step Three: “[We] Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him” (italics in original). In other words, alcoholics are urged to consider themselves in a new way, with new eyes. What characterizes those eyes, I believe, is mercy, is compassion.

Step Two refers to addiction as a form of insanity. Addiction has been called, or compared to, many things, but to choose “insanity” is to invoke, among other things, compassion. Like the “possessed” in the Jewish and Christian scriptures, the insane are considered to be objects of compassion, except by the harshest commentators on society. To be addicted is to perceive that one is not oneself, is not acting as one would otherwise choose. It feels at times as if a parasitic pseudo-self is at work, despite one’s truer desires.

The purpose of all the Steps is, I think, that alcoholics achieve moral integrity (as I argued in my last article), an integrity whose chief characteristic is compassion. The specific purpose of the first three Steps, then, will be

that alcoholics, both in the group, the “We,” and in the Higher Power that embraces and undergirds the group, will have a grounding in and a vision of compassion so that the task of moral transformation becomes achievable. The Merciful Higher Power not only gives the power, the motivation to begin, to continue with, and to complete the task of moral growth; it also gives the goal, gives a model of what that moral integrity will look like, once attained. If we turn our wills and our lives over to the care of God, we can have a decent hope of becoming, in time, people who ourselves care about other people and ourselves. We will regain the ability to put ourselves in the place of the other person, to feel what they feel, especially when we ourselves have caused them to feel either great pain or great joy.

And compassion surely figures in here, at least as a by-product of the process of taking responsibility. As long as you cling to the belief that you are good and others are bad, it will be impossible for you to empathize with them. All there is to know about other people is that they are wicked; why would you want to feel what wicked people feel? And of course you believe that you are good to an implausible extent, so why would you want to grow or change by acknowledging your limitations and the good things you might derive from understanding other people?

If recovering people can successfully complete this effort toward compassion, if they can become “willing,” they can make “amends,” both in the sense of regretting the behavior and of offering improved behavior for the future. The only proviso is also a function of compassion: we won’t make “amends” if it would cause further pain to anyone. We know now what other people’s pain feels like, and like an enlightened Buddhist, we are committed to reducing the amount of pain in the world.

III: COMPASSION AND MATURITY

The 12 Steps can serve as a process of healing but also as a process of growing in compassion, part of the process of human maturing. At this point I would like to take up the topic

of maturation in more detail. In my previous article I spoke of human integrity, of human wholeness, as the goal to which human life can most sensibly be directed. This wholeness embraces all the sides of a human being, including the physical, the emotional or psychological, the social, and the spiritual. I argued before that the “spiritual” can be taken to mean all these facets brought together in a coherent, meaningful way. This is also the process and goal of the Steps: the integration of the person as a whole, with no part or facet in self-destructive conflict with another part.

This insight leads to two questions. First, why do recovering people need such an intensive process of maturation? And second, why do the 12 Steps place such a premium on moral growth if the goal is growth of all sides of the person? After all, AA literature insists repeatedly that the goal is spiritual growth, not, or not exclusively, moral improvement.

The first question is easy to answer. Active addicts, on any reading and from any point of view, seem to be grossly immature. Someone who puts things ahead of people is obviously undeveloped from a moral point of view. Many of the typical behaviors of addicts mirror the beliefs and behaviors of little children - blaming others rather than taking responsibility for their own choices and actions; magical thinking, believing that they are so special that their actions won't have consequences.

A truism about addictions is that they tend to run in families, although different members may be addicted to different things—alcohol and drugs, food, sex, or addicts. A child in such a family will not learn mature or effective ways to deal with stress or conflict, because one or both parents never learned those ways and cannot demonstrate them. As the years go by, the children will fall behind their peers in their ability to employ constructive responses to life challenges.

Of course some addicts had reasonably healthy parents, but the parents' coping mechanisms

were overwhelmed by extraordinarily stressful circumstances—war, harsh economic conditions, severe and/or chronic illnesses in a parent or one of the children, frequent moving due to employment and so on. Children in these situations will also lag behind in learning mature coping mechanisms. Above all, they will probably not witness very many instances of compassion: overstressed and immature parents, whether or not they are officially addicts, are more likely to resort to blaming and self-pity than compassion in dealing with a troubled boss, partner, or child.

And even if children have healthy parents and healthy circumstances, maturation may nevertheless be impeded or totally suspended if the child experiences a serious, long-term physical or mental illness at an early age. Children will certainly fail to mature fully if that illness takes the form of their own addiction.

If a child is already in a painful environment, or an environment that the child perceives as painful, exposure to alcohol and other drugs often seems like blessed relief. Most addicts I know were seeking relief, if not at nine, then certainly by 12 or 13; and most of them found it without difficulty. What happens to children who are self-medicating during years when they are supposed to be learning, sometimes painfully, life lessons that are crucial to their maturation? They don't learn those lessons very well, or they skip them altogether. Physically they continue to grow, but emotionally and psychologically they remain truncated. And of course since this lag is not externally visible, they may pass for adults. Naturally such hollow adults are in no position to form healthy relationships with other adults. Perhaps they may feel more comfortable with people who are as undeveloped as they are.

What children whose development has been constricted fail to learn is compassion. To be able to feel another's pain, one must first have felt one's own and dealt with it in a positive way. But children who have learned, or taught themselves, to medicate pain from an early



age go through life anesthetized. Pain is not very real to them, their own or anyone else's. And if you haven't experienced pain, or have been so overwhelmed by it that you gave up on your own maturation, you cannot really feel someone else's pain, and you will remain half-formed. This is the meaning, by the way, of Andrew Miller's novel *Ingenious Pain*: set in 18th Century England, it tells the tale of a man born unable to feel pain. In those days, before the availability of surgical anesthetics, he builds on this oddity by becoming a surgeon: since he cannot feel the pain of his surgical patients, he is able to perform surgery more swiftly, more "unfeelingly." Eventually his gift is withdrawn; and, as sometimes happens to people who have been dulling pain with opiates for a while, he is at once swamped by all the pain he has avoided. It goes without saying that his career as a surgeon was over.

Since addicts have been unable or unwilling to accomplish a lot of the tasks of maturation, if and when their addictions come to a pause, they have an enormous backlog of life tasks to learn. This, by the way, is why meetings of recovering people are so helpful: it was a

lot easier for me to admit at the beginning of my recovery that I was 37 on the outside and perhaps nine on the inside to a roomful of people who had to make a similar admission than it would have been to say this to a group of well-functioning adults. This deficit of maturity is what the Steps are carefully calibrated to remedy, as I said in the previous section.

But why is the focus in the Steps so exclusively on moral maturity? One could argue a priori that moral maturity is the core of adulthood. Isn't the hallmark of the mature their ability to form healthy relationships with other people, adults as well as children? And if moral integrity is not the only element of human integrity, it is perhaps the most significant. If we consider compassion to be the chief trait of the moral adult, someone incapable of compassion is going to seem, not just pathologically narcissistic, but seriously underdeveloped as a human being.

Or one could argue that a person's moral development is the most significant element in their overall maturation even on the basis



of biology itself. The most evolved parts of the human brain, the uniquely human sectors that we do not apparently share with other mammals, are the parts that make choices, the parts that make us who we are ethically. It is surely no accident that these are also the parts of the brain that drugs first get to and affect. During an episode of drug use, the first thing to go is the ability to judge things like, should one take more? Should one shift to other, perhaps more potent, substances? Should one operate a vehicle to obtain those substances? This is why someone who is too drunk to walk will insist that he or she is perfectly able to drive: the ability to assess their state went south before physical coordination became impaired.

Many psychologists and philosophers have considered these matters. Lawrence Kohlberg, who posited a very influential model of moral development, is only one of many scholars who have studied these issues. But in my experience we don't need to study experts or their data to get a sense of how human moral development

occurs. Children themselves have an inchoate sense of those stages, and at a certain age become capable of discerning how far they or others have gotten in the process.

I learned this in the homely setting of preparing children in parishes for the Sacrament of Penance. Over time I developed a series of questions that helped children to get insight into moral growth. Perhaps the simplest example ran something like this: Suppose you are playing ball with friends. The ball gets away from you and breaks the window of the grouchy old man in the corner house, the one who yells at kids when they cross his lawn. At this point I would ask a differential question if I was dealing with 10-year-olds, kids about the age when there seems to be an advance in moral insight. I would ask, not just what would you do now but what would you have done a couple of years ago, when you were younger?

Ten year olds are not only more morally mature than younger children, but they know it and are justifiably proud of it. Anyway, the answer would invariably take this form: 1) when we were little kids, we would have run away and hope we didn't get caught; 2) but now that we are advanced 10-year-olds, we would go up to the grouchy guy's house, ring the bell, tell him that we were the ones who broke his window, and offer to fix it, or have our parents do so.

In other words, children are conscious of being more morally mature at 10. And they have a pretty good sense of what constitutes moral maturity: among other things, the willingness to take responsibility for one's unfortunate behavior, as well as a willingness to repair the damage that behavior has caused. Surely it's no accident that these are precisely the behaviors that AA's Steps 4 and 5, and then Steps 8 and 9, suggest that the recovering alcoholic perform. The practice of such behaviors helps to fill the gaps in moral maturity with which addicts arrive at the 12 Step program.

What is the wellspring of such behavior, in a 10-year-old or in an adult trying to learn a 10-year-old's lesson? Parents of 10-year-olds have told me that they know their children

have reached this stage when the children, for pretty much the first time, spontaneously apologize for hurting their parents. The crucial new insight from children takes the form of compassion: they now can feel with their parents the pain that their ill-judged behavior has caused them.

IV: A YEAR OF MERCY

This article, and this issue, center on the topic of mercy. Mercy is of course the focus of a special year that Pope Francis has announced, to begin on December 8th, 2015. He cites many reasons for citing this theme at this time, but he especially stresses, quoting his predecessor St. John Paul II, how much the world needs to be reminded of mercy at the present time, with refugees fleeing with their children from violence. Francis notes that “sad to say, we must admit that the practice of mercy is waning in the wider culture. In some cases the word seems to have dropped out of use” (*Misericordiae Vultus*, “The Face of Mercy,” # 10).

Much of the letter is devoted to the mercy that God shows humanity in the traditions of Judaism and Islam as well as Christianity. Francis cites many texts from the Jewish and the Christian Scriptures, in support of this view of “a loving God.” Pope Francis calls on human beings (and not just members of the Catholic Church) to imitate this divine mercy in their dealings with others and with all creatures. In the second section, he offers this definition of mercy: “Mercy: the ultimate and supreme act by which God comes to meet us. Mercy: the fundamental law that dwells in the heart of every person who looks sincerely into the eyes of his brothers and sisters on the path of life. Mercy: the bridge that connects God and man, opening our hearts to a hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness.” “The fundamental law” is precisely what shapes the attitudes of recovering people to one another, in the practice of the Steps, and particularly in the observance of the 12 Traditions. And AA, like Francis, here and elsewhere (see # 14) likens the spiritual life to a path, a journey, “the Road of Happy Destiny” (Big Book, 164).

Twelve step thinking considers forgiveness a unifying topic. In the process of moral maturation shaped by the “middle steps,” recovering persons may get stuck on the harm they feel that others have done them. A way through this impasse comes when they consider their own need for forgiveness for the harm that they have done others. Even more, the recovering person is to take initiative to ask for that forgiveness, especially from people whom they have greatly harmed. Pope Francis makes a similar point from a religious point of view, one enshrined in the Lord’s Prayer: “. . . we are called to show mercy because mercy has first been shown to us [by God]. Pardoning offences becomes the clearest expression of merciful love, and for us Christians it is an imperative from which we cannot excuse ourselves. At times how hard it seems to forgive! And yet pardon is the instrument placed into our fragile hands to attain serenity of heart. To let go of anger, wrath, violence, and revenge are necessary conditions to living joyfully” (# 9). Note Pope Francis even uses the word “serenity,” one of the elements of the prayer most beloved by 12 Step people.

In the same section in which Pope Francis speaks of the spiritual life as a pilgrimage, and the spiritual person as “a visitor,” he also ties the practice of mercy to conversion. If one makes a literal pilgrimage during the Year of Mercy, “this will be a sign that mercy is also a goal to reach and requires dedication and sacrifice. May pilgrimage be an impetus to conversion: by crossing the threshold of the Holy Door [in Rome or at other sites around the world], we will find the strength to embrace God’s mercy and dedicate ourselves to being merciful with others as the Father has been with us” (# 14). Just so the early members of AA considered conversion absolutely necessary for recovery, although they tended to use less loaded terms to speak of this same experience, like “spiritual awakening” or “vital spiritual experiences . . . huge emotional displacements and rearrangements.” To become merciful requires a large spiritual shift for addicts, who know little of mercy.



Pope Francis goes into some detail about “the works of mercy,” and what actions these new feelings will generate in the converted person. Characteristically, he lists many varieties of the poor and the powerless: At the Last Judgement, “we will be asked if we have helped others to escape the doubt that causes them to fall into despair and which is often a source of loneliness; if we have helped to overcome the ignorance in which millions of people live, especially children deprived of the necessary means to free them from the bonds of poverty; if we have been close to the lonely and afflicted; if we have forgiven those who have offended us and have rejected all forms of anger and hate that lead to violence; if we have had the kind of patience God shows, who is so patient with us; and if we have commended our brothers and sisters to the Lord in prayer” (# 15). These practices overlap with the activities that the “spiritually awakened” addict engages in while practicing the Twelfth Step.

Pope Francis is surely not naïve about the social concomitants of addiction. With his experience of Latin America, source of a lot of the drugs consumed in the United States, and of the international cartels, in Mexico, Italy,

Russia, and so on, that profit by addiction, he even calls for those involved in the “business side” of addiction to consider mercy. In Section 19, he calls to conversion members of “criminal organizations of any kind”: “For their own good, I beg them to change their lives.” Then he extends “the same invitation” to “those who either perpetrate or participate in corruption.” 12 Step literature in my experience often focuses on the effects of addiction on individuals and on families. Only rarely do they consider the effects of addiction on whole classes, on whole societies and nations, and on the environment. We should never lose sight of the fact that an enormous portion of the world economy is tied to the production and consumption of illegal, and therefore absurdly lucrative drugs.

SURPRISE!

I would like to end this article where Francis ends his proclamation of a Year of Mercy. In his concluding paragraph, he urges the faithful like this: “In this Jubilee Year, let us allow God to surprise us. He never tires of throwing open the doors of his heart and repeats that He loves us and wants to share his love with us” (# 25). “Surprise” is perhaps the most notable quality about 12 Step recovery—a surprise that leads naturally to gratitude. For centuries people afflicted with addiction saw their conditions worsen. They experienced futile efforts to help them by people who cared for them. They made efforts, sometimes heroic, to overcome their addictions, sometimes succeeding for a while, only to fail and to sink to a lower level. The stories in the Big Book are a harrowing anthology of such lives. But in each story, and in the case of millions of recovering addicts, a Higher Power has turned out to be full of surprises. By means of a process of moral maturation centered on the experience of compassion, these addicts have, in C. S. Lewis’s title phrase, been “surprised by joy,” by a merciful possibility that they could never have imagined, sought, or effectuated. As Bill Wilson, the founder of AA, puts it in his giddy prose, “We have found much of heaven and we have been rocketed into a fourth dimension of

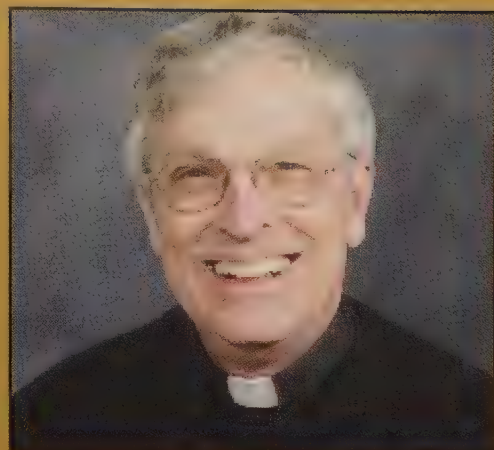
existence of which we had not even dreamed” (Big Book, 25). Or, as the more down to earth Pope Francis puts it, “For if we have received the love which restores meaning to our lives, how can we fail to share it with others” (Joy of the Gospel, # 8)?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Fr. Harbaugh suggests that at the core of recovery from addiction is compassion or mercy: that is, first of all having mercy on myself and then, identifying with the other and turning away from being self-absorbed. Have I found these steps to be true in my own struggles to overcome “control issues?”

Surprise is an important part of the freeing experience of the “12 steps” – being surprised by forgiveness. Can I forgive myself for faults and failings? Do I believe in forgiveness when it is offered to me?

Am I open to being surprised?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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WALKING WITH THOSE WE SERVE

-Edward Phelan, FSC



My father was a New York City cop in the old 72nd precinct in the Red Hook neighborhood of Brooklyn during the 1940's. His job included guarding a gigantic hole in the ground that would later become the Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel, being a crossing guard and generally keeping an eye on the neighborhood—one of the poorest and most ethnically diverse communities in New York City at that time.

Dad felt that his back was not only covered by his fellow officers, but also by the residents of Red Hook. It was clear that he earned their trust and protection by the way he policed the neighborhood, which he knew well because he was recruited for the job from one of its street corners. He spent most of the day in conversations with residents as he walked the beat, no matter the weather or the season. He made sure teenagers were more often delivered home for family adjudication instead of to the precinct. He was a meat-and-potato guy, but learned to appreciate Italian and Chinese cuisine with neighborhood families on dinner break. And on nights when the weather turned particularly bad, Dad was always welcomed by Joe Fung in the back room of his laundry shop.

There is a note I discovered among Dad's things I will always cherish—a letter addressed to him at home in Brooklyn from a young elementary school student. After leaving his street crossing post, the boy

wrote to him at home and said he missed my father on the crossing. He thanked him for his advice and presence, and wanted Dad to know that he was doing much better in school.

The manner in which these New York City cops—from a seemingly long gone era—worked with the residents might not be deemed appropriate today, especially given the recent events in Ferguson, Baltimore and Staten Island. But this type of relationship is exactly what is needed today.

In predominantly poor neighborhoods in cities across the US today, it is clear that officers deliver their brand of policing “to” the population and not “with” the population—holding great disregard for their rights and providing zero notion of community policing. It seems they believe residents are to be managed—told, supervised and even punished sometimes—on the spot or in the police van. Only in the better neighborhoods with reduced racism and classism are residents treated differently. Police departments—like many other institutions in our society—severely limit their effectiveness by concentrating on their service “to” the population with little understanding of how it could be delivered more effectively, efficiently and simply “with” them.

The Lasallian family of which I am a part is made up of over 80,000 Christian Brothers (like myself), men and women teachers, administrators, counselors and staff in

nearly 1,000 colleges, high schools, middle schools, and child care institutions around the globe. From where I stand in a world filled with caring educators and counselors, it is clear to me that we must also bring the “to” and the “with” into balance. For almost 300 years since its founding in France, this family of Lasallian educators was almost entirely made up of De La Salle Christian Brothers, and their mission was human and Christian education “to” the poor—not “with” the poor.

Since the 1950s and Vatican II, these Brothers have shared their mission with so many lay women and men that the Brothers today only account for less than 3% of the Lasallian family. Yet the number of students reached is four times what it was when Vatican II opened.

Recently, this family of Lasallian educators added “with” to their mission statement that was once a service “to the poor.” In the 2015 revised rule of the De La Salle Christian Brothers, they addressed how the Lasallian mission is expanded in secularized and multicultural contexts as such: “The Brothers strive to enter into a respectful dialogue with the persons they are called to serve. This attitude presupposes openness and a willingness to listen, to learn, to witness Gospel values, and, as far as possible, to announce the Word of God.” (14.1)

The New York Times captured New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio’s effort to reform the police department as “a ‘pioneering’ step in police reform; the city is expected to debut a new neighborhood-based policing model, in which patrol officers would be given about one-third of their day away from radio calls to develop closer relationships with residents of their precincts.”

In his day, my dad was just such an officer, spending more time with those he served than with the data and equipment that came with the job. If he were here today, he would be delighted at this news from the mayor, and I would expect he would see the example of his life carried on to his son even in a different capacity as a De La Salle Christian Brother—ministering always with people and not to people. What a concept!



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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CULTIVATING COMPASSION DEVELOPING A HABIT OF MERCY AND RECOGNIZING ITS INTERRUPTIONS

-Dr. Janet K. Ruffing, RSM

Catherine McAuley, founder of the Sisters of Mercy, confidently wrote about the reciprocal relationship in the lives of her sisters between contemplation and action, between our centeredness in God and the spiritual and corporal works of mercy as constituting "the very business of our lives" (Neuman, 390). She was convinced that God empowers the particular grace of developing a habit of mercy so that we learn to embody God's compassion in our world and that we become holy in this process. Centered in God, whose face we concretely encounter in Jesus (*Misericordia Vultus*) we quickly learn that God makes our works of mercy fruitful not only for those we serve, those with whom we stand in solidarity, and those from whom we learn mercy, but for ourselves as well. I believe this dynamic simply describes how we learn to be Christians. God, who is "rich in mercy," draws us ever closer to God's own heart, making our hearts one with God's. Plunged into the world's suffering, we rely on God's abundant and continual flow of mercy to us and through us which then pours itself out upon those who suffer.

MERCY NEVER STANDS ALONE

Contemporary Biblical scholarship has richly described how central compassion is in the ministry of Jesus who exemplified it in the many scenes in which he is portrayed as being moved with compassion in response to the suffering of one woman seeking His help and whom He both heals and humanizes. Compassion is more than a feeling, although it includes feelings and emotions or the affective side of ourselves. It also involves an effective response, a remedy or amelioration of concrete suffering.



Mercy is included among the beatitudes: “Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy” (Matt. 5:7). Mercy is even more concretely described in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:25-37) which exemplifies the merciful response to the robbery victim left in a ditch by the side of the road. Two men pass by without stopping, both of whom ought to have responded with compassion. But it is the outcast (from a Jewish perspective) the despised other, who immediately and personally tends the man’s wounds, carries him to sustained help, and pays for his care into the future.

This parable demonstrates a spontaneous compassionate response to the victim’s situation combined with an effective remedy. In this parable, Jesus teaches that everyone is our “neighbor,” regardless of any other social differences and so is deserving of our merciful and loving response. Mercy is an empathic response to another’s suffering, a capacity to respond affectively to the plight of another, as we would hope another would respond to us were we in his or her situation. The compassionate person suffers with, feels the pain of another, deeply honoring the other’s humanity. Mercy recognizes

a shared humanity with the other, compelling a response in action. Jesus is shown weeping, deeply moved, tender, etc. even before he heals or restores life. He is first affected emotionally by the other person and their particular suffering, then responds.

In yet another parable which correlates the works of mercy with the beatitudes, Jesus clearly sets the standard of Christian life. Those who have developed a life-long habit of compassion will be judged worthy to enter the kingdom of heaven. Jesus identifies himself with every form of suffering person, the hungry, the thirsty, the homeless stranger, the naked, the sick, the prisoner, and the unburied dead. He astonishes his hearers by asserting that what you have done for these suffering people you have done to me (Matt. 25:31-46). These compassionate responses later became known as the corporal works of mercy. Jesus, as the face of God’s mercy, embodied mercy in the way He related to people, in His teaching, and in His aspirations for his disciples.

DEVELOPING A HABIT OF MERCY

If we are to be mercy, we need to cultivate this “habit of the heart” in the way we choose “to live in the mercy of God” (Levertov, 30-2). If we have not experienced God’s compassionate response to us in our own suffering, or through the compassionate response of another, it is all the more difficult to develop empathy toward the suffering of another; we learn mercy through experiencing the compassionate response of others toward us in our need. Catherine McAuley deeply believed that contemplative prayer, living in the presence and the mercy of God, was the necessary corollary to doing the spiritual and corporal works of mercy on a daily basis. The contemplative experience of oneness with Christ assures us that God’s mercy flows through us and complements our own limited capacity for being merciful. When we are rooted in our relationship with God, our deeds of mercy and compassion concretely express God’s mercy.

Developing this habit of mercy involves both recognizing and receiving this gift of the mercy

of God in our prayer and practicing it in our own lives. Moral theologian Richard Gula writes about the necessity of developing the virtues that are expressed as the fruits of the spirit and the spiritual and corporal works of mercy (2011, 25). He emphasizes that "making moral choices is not so much a matter of principles and consequences reigning over our thoughts and actions." (27) Rather, it is more a matter of developing habits "that help us discern what to do so that we can live well and be good people" (27). He describes virtues as "habits of the heart" inclined toward values. Rooted within us these virtues are ultimately a matter of love. What we are describing is "a way of connecting head, heart, and hands, unifying the whole self in a dynamic way." If we have cultivated a habit of mercy, we will intuitively recognize in a given situation how to respond mercifully and freely do so because this is who we have become through practice and aspiration. Usually, in most instances we respond out of such developed habits rather than having the luxury of engaging in considered moral reflection.

COMPASSION RECEIVED ENABLES US TO BE COMPASSIONATE TO SELF AND OTHERS

Compassion arises from an empathic and generous heart. It is often the result of having experienced empathic responses from another -- a parent, a sibling, a friend - to our own suffering, which elicits a similar response from us to another's pain or suffering. We often learn from another's response to us the healing and humanizing effects of such responses. As a result, we are able to be compassionate toward our own suffering as well as to that of others. Since mercy is also effective action, we learn a repertoire of

responses from significant others who respond in compassionate and effective ways to our suffering or the pain of others.

Every person's suffering is both unique yet similar to another's. Over time, we develop a habit of mercy which draws on a depth of experience as to how we could respond in a given situation. This becomes a kind of practical wisdom-- an attitude of the heart combined with discerning and effective action. Such virtue is its own reward. We experience congruence between our aspiration to be merciful persons and our ability to live in such a fashion. Compassionate love poured out on us inspires and motivates us to "go and do likewise" (as Jesus advised the lawyer in Luke 10). Relieving suffering increases our sense that we make a difference in our world, and thus urges us onward toward the next empathic response. The recipient of our care may in turn respond in like fashion to another suffering person, and the cycle goes on.

MERCY IN RELATIONSHIPS

Patricia Smith, RSM, draws on a definition from theologian Wendy Farley to describe what this process looks like. "Mercy is a mode of relationship and a power. Wounded (but not destroyed) by the suffering of others. Propelled to action, now." She writes:

Mercy is a mode of relationship, not a momentary or sporadic feeling. It is, rather, a habit of the mind and heart, a way of organizing and interpreting the world. It is an enduring approach to the world. And, like any relationship, it is a two-way-street.

AND A POWER.

This is the exciting, challenging part. Mercy

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is only what it is when it is effective—when it survives against great odds and when it empowers all who come within its orbit of care. Because mercy opposes injustice and whatever is degrading, it is likely to involve danger. Conflict is inevitable; struggle enduring. Courage is needed, as never before, in our time.

WOUNDED (BUT NOT DESTROYED) BY THE SUFFERING OF OTHERS.

If Mercy is compassion, or “suffering with,” it is also comfort, or ‘standing strong with.’ An inner-city minister in Baltimore put it beautifully: “Mercy is justice in tears.”

PROPELLED TO ACTION.

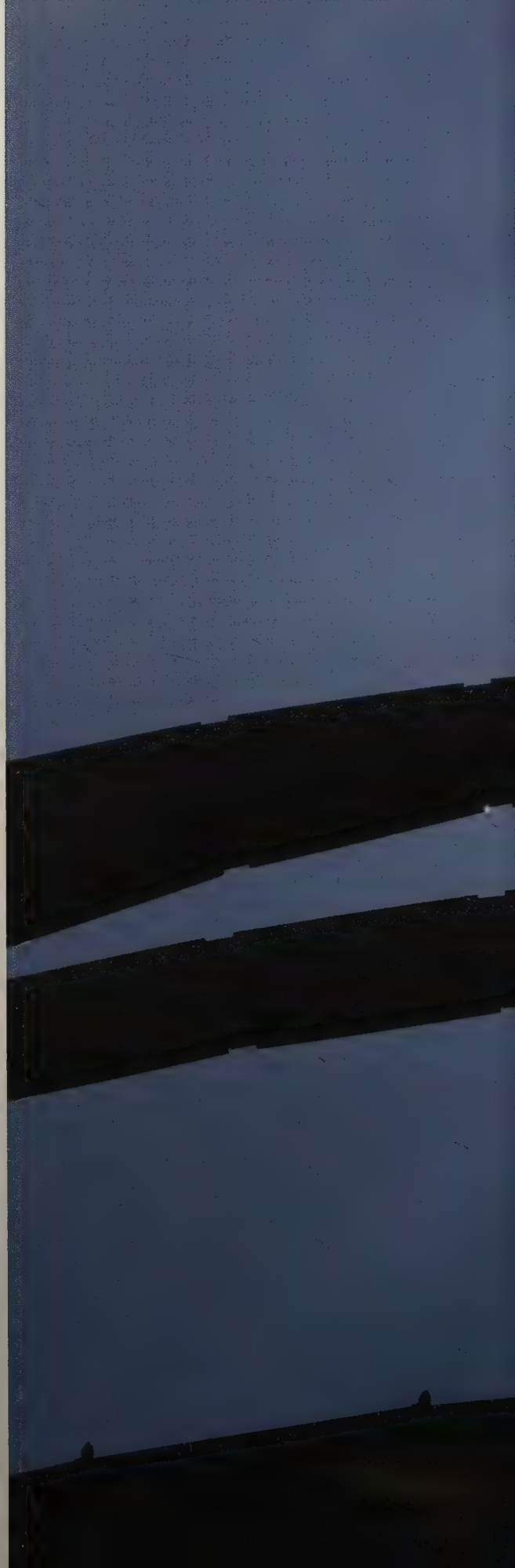
Propelled is a very active verb. It says that mercy is God’s empowering presence in the world, a presence known only in and through those who act in God’s merciful name. ...

NOW.

The God of mercy does not wait to care for us at the end of our lives or at the end of time. This God cares for us during all time. Made in this God’s image, we are exhorted by Mother Jones: “Pray for the dead, but fight like hell for the living.” This means practical action. Now. (1994, 10)

MERCY MUST GO TO THE ROOT CAUSES

A major development since the middle of the 20th century has been the conviction and insight that “mercy” necessarily includes social justice as a way to overcome social sin. Rather than simply and continuously extending mercy, we need to ask questions about the structural causes of suffering. True compassion addresses the root causes of suffering and also asks questions about our unconscious complicity in those structures. Today, our preferred language for social sin is “structural sin” to describe the harm done to the countless majority of people in the world through the on-going functioning of social systems designed to benefit the privileged few at the expense of the vast majority. The systemically privileged do not experience any particular sense of guilt since these systems largely operate without our express permission. The privileged experience blindness rather than guilt.





We have witnessed growing gaps of inequality within U.S. culture so that the 1% and the 2% are flourishing at the expense of the 98%. But this growing inequality in our nation pales before the reality that the vast majority of the world's population is experiencing even greater suffering because of our systemic environmental, political, military, and economic exploitation of the human and material resources of our world.

Today, mercy as a habit of the heart must expand to include the neighbor we cannot see, whose lands are despoiled by our waste and our extraction of their natural resources for our economic benefit. South African theologian, Albert Nolan, less than ten years ago wrote about the globalization of compassion and desires for peace and justice (2006). He is confident that the systemic effects of negative globalization are being met by grassroots movements embodying a corresponding globalization of the virtues needed to combat the worst effects of irresponsible capitalism.

Theologian Maureen O'Connell (2009) writes poignantly about the need to develop political compassion as a way of loving our neighbor in an age of globalization. Framing her ethical reflections in the language of the "Parable of the Good Samaritan," she says, "...globalization has blurred the distinction between those who innocently travel and those who rob others of their dignity along the way. Today, the road grows more and more treacherous for more and more people. Consequently, Samaritanism means we must integrate loving our suffering neighbors with seeking their forgiveness for our participation in the sins of individualism, consumerism, and privilege" (206).

CULTURAL BARRIERS TO THE FOLLOWERS OF MERCY

While all of us have heard these social critiques before, we must admit that it is very difficult to "see through" the cultural context (illusion) in which we live. Individualism is a pervasive invitation to experience our world and our place in it, exclusively as individuals. Will I be better off? Will I benefit from some proposal?

We are not encouraged to reframe the question, "How will this action/decision cause a host of others to suffer want, exploitation, or loss of the necessary conditions for life?" Very little in the hyper-connected world of our media helps us perceive our connection to the causes of others' suffering. Are we in any way responsible for the flood of immigration (legal or undocumented) because of our trade agreements and the economic disadvantages for people living south of our border? We are not tutored by our culture to question what is being done in our name governmentally and commercially.

Within our society, we have become consumers rather than citizens. In the face of 9/11 we were told "to go shopping at the mall" when most people wanted to stay home and be close to their families. We often fail to wonder what the consequences might be for women in India, Bangladesh, China, or Sri Lanka who produce much of the clothing we wear at prices that are nearly as low as the cost to mail an item within the US. If we fail to buy these goods, what would happen? After all, they are already here. Such artificially low prices perpetuate harsh working conditions for those who actually produce these goods and who receive very little benefit proportionate to their long hours of labor. When consumers go shopping, they don't tend to consider possible social consequences elsewhere.

Privilege for us is largely a function of systemic racism that goes on in the unacknowledged background of life that systemically maintains "white privilege."

Our failure within the US to dismantle systemic racism continues to haunt us. Attention at the

present is on policing practices all over the country where we white people are discovering what every person of color has long known about how they can expect to be treated by the police who are supposed to keep everyone safe. We who are white fail to recognize why we frequently live in relative safety while others live in constant danger.

PERSONAL CHARITY IS NOT ENOUGH; WE
NEED COMMUNITIES THAT CHALLENGE US
TO FACE THE TRUTH

Growing in political compassion as described by O'Connell will take a great deal of effort on our part because compassion is frequently privatized as purely personal charity in many Christian contexts. After we uncover our connections to the causes of others' suffering, we will still need "to interpret the social contexts of suffering" (206) through hearing the stories of those who suffer albeit usually unknown to us but at our collective hands. This will lead us, in this analysis "to real relationships with real people who seek a common goal" (206). O'Connell promises these more complex ways of reflecting with others and joining with bands of socially conscious and self-aware people who accept the challenge to free their neighbors from the oppressive processes of globalization" (206-7) will also "free themselves from its dehumanizing values and practices" (207). What is most important in this analysis is that this growth in compassion requires communities of one kind or another. This is a process of deeper reflection and social connection across differences. It cannot be done in isolation but only in community.

Developing virtuous habits is a life-long process. We become more merciful when we live in this

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Flow of mercy and when we continue to learn how to be more merciful. The psalmist sings: "Mercy (steadfast love) and faithfulness will meet; justice and peace shall kiss, justice shall spring up from the earth" (Ps. 85). We continue to deepen our capacities for mercy when we hold mercy and social justice together.

INTERRUPTIONS OF MERCY

What impairs or interrupts this flow of mercy, originating in God's mercy toward us and enjoined on us as part of the love command? There are both psychological impairments to our compassion as well as forms of cultural distraction that interrupt compassion. Unfortunately, forms of cultural distraction cannot be dealt with in the space allotted for this essay.

DISTANCING OR FUSING WITH THE OTHER

From a psychological perspective, a genuinely compassionate person has a developed capacity for empathy. Empathy has both an affective and cognitive dimension. "Empathy is the ability to tolerate the tension of being truly open to the experience of another, the ability to attempt actively to understand the subjective world of the other and at the same time to remain a differentiated person" (Musgrave, 2003, 10).

Empathy leads us to respond to the felt and understood reality of others without fusing with them, replacing their thoughts and feelings with ours, or distancing ourselves from them. It is a real connection with them in which we genuinely respond to them, demonstrating we are really listening and understanding their world regardless of how different it may be from our own. This capacity to feel with and think with another suffering person will cause us pain. Compassion literally means "with suffering." We suffer with others without fusing with them, without replacing their thoughts and feelings with our own, or distancing ourselves from them to ward off the pain of their suffering. There is perhaps nothing more comforting than experiencing a genuinely empathic presence from another whether a friend, clinician, teacher, or person in pastoral ministry.

ANY IMPAIRMENT OF EMPATHY WILL INTERRUPT OUR CAPACITY TO BE COMPASSIONATE

If we cannot tolerate another's world view, we are likely to shut down emotionally and distance ourselves. Our contemporary culture tends to encourage us to stay fixed in our point of view and to reject or ignore the points of view of those who differ from us; quite often the most convenient way to handle a situation is by distancing ourselves. Equally disruptive of compassion is the other extreme, the tendency to fuse with another. To over identify with a person can cause us to replace their particular suffering and their feelings with our own, thereby denying their feelings and the uniqueness of their particular experience. Empathy means being with the other without either fusion or distancing, both of which will interrupt our attempts to be compassionate when something about the other person's thoughts or feelings is more than we can handle.

PERSONALITY DISORDERS

Persons who suffer from major personality disorders (such as Schizoid, Antisocial, Borderline, and Narcissism) are all incapable of compassionate responses to another's suffering because of their own personality deficiencies. By definition a "Personality Disorder" is "an enduring pattern of inner experience and behavior that deviates markedly from the expectations of the individual's culture." It is marked by how they perceive and interpret self, other people and events, how they relate emotionally, and how they function interpersonally (DSM-IV, 1995, 275-286). Persons who suffer from any of these disorders do not have the capacity to be genuinely empathic or to really care about other persons and their well-being. Their particular "disorder" renders them incapable of altruistic compassion for another. Their own suffering will impair their capacity to respond mercifully to another and they may often be unable to recognize and respond to compassion others may show for them.

Burn-out and compassion fatigue have been recognized as potential effects of exposure to traumatic stress in others we might accompany. Among these, burn-out is commonly not understood to be a result of counter-transferential reactions to congregants or clients. Maslach (1982) defined burn-out as “a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment.”

Simple burnout has also been defined as “...a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion, caused by long term involvement in emotionally demanding situations” (Cited in Figley, 1436). Burnout can be the result of overload, an inability to cope with the intense emotional reactions typical of many ministry encounters as well as those typical for psychologists, social workers, and others in the helping professions. Burnout is a prevalent condition among helping professionals (Maslach and Jackson, 1984).

Conditions within the work environment may also be a major contributing factor as well as other stressors such as long hours, inadequate facilities, and hostility in the workplace (Sprang, Clark, and Whitt-Woosley, 260, 262). Sometimes burn-out indicates a poor fit between one’s basic personality and the demands of many helping professions and may require “changing jobs or careers” (Figley, 1436). Further, Figley clarifies:

Burnout symptoms are categorized as Physical Symptoms (e.g. physical exhaustion, sleeping difficulties, and somatic problems); Emotional Symptoms (e.g. irritability, anxiety, depression, guilt, and a sense of helplessness); Behavioral Symptoms (e.g. aggression, callousness, pessimism, defensiveness, cynicism, avoidance of clients, substance abuse); Work-Related Symptoms (e.g. quitting the job, poor work performance, absenteeism, tardiness, avoidance of work and risk-taking), and; Interpersonal Symptoms (perfunctory communication, inability to concentrate, social withdrawal, lack of a sense of humor, dehumanization and poor interactions) (1436).

Burn-out may go unrecognized by the person experiencing it, and the effect of depersonalization seriously interrupts or impairs one’s capacity for demonstrating compassion for another.

Compassion fatigue was defined by Figley (2002) as “a state of tension and preoccupation with the traumatized patients by re-experiencing the traumatic events, avoidance/numbing of reminders, persistent arousal (e.g. anxiety) associated with the patient. It is a function of bearing witness to the suffering of others” (1435). Compassion fatigue is distinct from countertransference in the clinical relationship. Also called “secondary traumatic stress disorder” with symptoms similar to PTSD, it is distinctive in that technically it refers to the suffering of the family who accompany the person with PTSD.

Compassion fatigue names this form of distress in a positive way by acknowledging that “The very act of being compassionate and empathic extracts a cost under most circumstances. In our effort to view the world from the perspective of the suffering, we suffer. The meaning of compassion is to bear suffering. Compassion Fatigue, like any other kind of fatigue, reduces our capacity or our interest in bearing the suffering of others” (Figley, 2002, 1434). Compassion Fatigue differs from burnout and from counter-transference, inasmuch as people suffering from compassion fatigue still care about the people they are helping and have their well-being at heart. Unlike burnout, the family or loved ones still maintain empathy despite their own muted, diminished ability for sustained response. Without empathic response to suffering clients, there would be no compassion fatigue.

According to Figley’s model, compassionate helpers can protect themselves from compassion fatigue if they learn how to disengage from their clients after sessions and also develop a sense of satisfaction at what has been accomplished. These two factors can diminish “residual compassion stress” caused by preoccupations with a particular client and dissatisfaction with lack of perceived improvement.



Finally, if any life disruption occurs for the helper - illness, life-style changes, professional responsibilities, etc. - the helper may not have the resilience to avoid falling into compassion fatigue.

Figley offers the good news that compassion fatigue can be treated in similar ways as PTSD can be managed—desensitization and greater attention to self-care, including sufficient rest and increasing one's own social support network. I would suggest that not only therapists suffer from compassion fatigue, but many people in the helping professions and ministry are also susceptible.

It is also important to remember that compassion satisfaction is just as important a reality as compassion fatigue. Compassion satisfaction appears to be similar to Figley's construct for one's sense of achievement in effectively helping another. Figley says it includes the ability to recognize "where the psychotherapist's responsibilities end and the client's responsibilities

begin" (1437-8). Sprang, et. al. (2007); he characterized compassion satisfaction as meaning "caregiving is an energy-enhancing experience, increased self-efficacy" (264). Further they found that "specialized trauma training appears to provide clinicians with some protection against compassion fatigue and also enhances compassion satisfaction" (275).

CONCLUSION

There is perhaps nothing more rewarding than experiencing the flourishing of another person whose suffering is relieved and whose life is enhanced through our empathic ability, concern and response. These are psychological descriptions of our experience as merciful persons in our world, full of joy in the intrinsic reward of seeing another flourish after a period of distress or suffering, through our attentiveness. "Living in the mercy of God" from a spiritual perspective implies knowledge of how to help others through



our empathic responses as well as the support of clinical assistance for ourselves if we experience signs of compassion stress and an ever deepening relationship with our compassionate God.

We are not the source of compassion. God is. Ultimately our capacity for mediating God's mercy to the world depends on our ability to participate in God's compassion. We will still suffer when we experience the pain of others in our world far and near, but we will recognize we are not alone. We will learn how to remain centered in God even while we are engaged in the spiritual and corporal works of mercy, receiving God's love and compassion ourselves even as we become faces of Christ mediating mercy to suffering women, men, and young people in our world. As Pope Francis puts it, "From the heart of the Trinity, from the depths of the mystery of God, the great river of mercy wells up and overflows unceasingly. It is a spring that will never run dry, no matter how many people draw from it. Every time someone is in need, he or she can approach it, because the mercy of God never ends" (25, 2015).

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QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

"If Mercy never stands alone:" it begins with God and
flows through us and often comes to us through the
goodness and generosity of others. Mercy stands with
justice and truth and concrete deeds of service. In my
life experience, is mercy/compassion sometimes like
a faucet I chose to turn on or off or is it a habit? What
steps might I take to make mercy a habit that naturally
and spontaneously "works" and shines through me?



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HEART'S HOME

-Grayson Heenan



I first heard of Heart's Home as a sophomore at Boston College. I was stunned by the radical simplicity of their life and mission: to be missionaries of compassion. Several missionaries (none from the United States) stationed in New York City had traveled to Boston on an invitation and gave our Catholic student group a short presentation on their work. There was no mention of "education initiatives," "development projects," "outreach," or "material aid." Their mission, rather, was to encounter those who suffer, especially those who suffer the most – "presence of compassion" summed up their mission. My initial response was sophomoric but understandable for a young American male trying his best to build a flashy résumé: "This is impractical! What's the point? How do you measure the success?" I thought.

What did impress me about Heart's Home, however, was its sacramental life, its commitment to daily prayer, its practice of poverty, and its incarnational theology – missionaries lived in Heart's Homes located in the heart of the world's poorest places; a commitment was made to become neighbors to the suffering, to walk the same streets and breathe the same air as them. In the end, these elements won out in my discernment of missionary groups as I entered, not without difficulty, their missionary logic of presence, compassion, and coming to share in the life of the *anawim*, God's little ones. I had to swallow my savior-complex pride and fight against the urge to impose my Western ideas of "help" and social concern. Since signing up for my mission in 2010, the number of

Heart's Home missionary houses in the world has grown from 35 to 46 across five different continents. Argentina was chosen as my mission country; a month after my college graduation, I began a 13-month mission in Villa Jardin, a vibrant slum south of Buenos Aires along the famously polluted Riachuelo river.

The Argentine "villa miseria," with its poorly constructed houses, stray cats and dogs, narrow alley-way streets, high crime rates, and drug and alcohol abuse, was in fact a favorite place to visit for the former Cardinal Archbishop of Buenos Aires, Jorge Bergoglio. Our current Pope, during his time in Buenos Aires, had a hand-picked team of priests assigned to these places who he supported and visited frequently (always coming in by public transportation). It was said that Bergoglio got his oxygen from the villa, a breath of air to reconnect with what the Church ought to be – a field hospital ministering to the brokenness and wounds of humanity, especially of those at the margin. For him, this place was both existential and geographic periphery since the sprawling villas surrounded the wealthier Buenos Aires city center.

It was in this place that I began the Heart's Home school of love and where I learned to share with the poor, suffering, lonely, aged, and sick the friendship that I myself encountered in our daily life of prayer. How can I even begin to describe that crazy year? The struggle with compassion, I found, was that you opened yourself up to having your heart broken. That happened to me during the mission, yet the odd result of all this was actually a deeper freedom and generosity. "Heart's Home" is the English translation from the French "Point Coeur" – a sharper phrase in French meant to convey the critical point of the heart, that open vessel that receives and gives life. God's words to the prophet Ezekiel just about captured the essence of my mission: "A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh" (Ez 36:26). This is something Pope Francis communicates to us time and again: it's in going to the periphery that our stony, self-

referential, smug, cold hearts are opened, refashioned, and freed from the lonely prison of egoism and self-satisfaction. And what's more: Christ Himself awaits us at the periphery.

One of my most vivid memories from my thirteen months comes from the dying weeks of the Argentine summer, a sultry afternoon during Holy Week – Good Friday. After our lunch, another missionary and I decided to visit a special friend we knew from the parish soup kitchen. She lived farther away from us than maybe all of our friends, a good 30-40 minute walk, and we knew her to be a conflicted soul. We didn't know which came first – her cognitive disorder or her alcoholism. She was elderly and wore lots of makeup that seemed to melt in the Argentine sun, kind of like a character in a Flannery O'Connor short story. Everyone in her family had deserted her – her two daughters, her husband – and she hardly had any friends. Our visit with her began in an entirely normal way with some small talk but after a certain point, she began to open her heart to us. "I'm so lonely. Everyone has abandoned me," she said. At one point, she threw her head back and exclaimed, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me! No one loves me. No one!" She repeated herself several times, turning to us: "No one loves me. Except you all. I know you love me."

As the other missionary and I stumbled out again into the afternoon sun, it struck us as we were walking back home: this woman had expressed her suffering in the very words of Christ at roughly 3 p.m. on Good Friday! That line I had always struggled with intellectually came back to me with newfound clarity: "whatever you do to the least of my brothers and sisters, you do to me" (Mt 25:40). The founder of Heart's Home, Fr. Thierry Roucy, has remarked before that the central image of the mission of compassion is Mary at the foot of the Cross. We witnessed a slice of Calvary that sultry day with our friend. Christ was waiting for us in this elderly lady, ready to show the humility of His heart and the depth of His love for and identification with this "least" of His children. It was almost as if Christ were telling us that we were consoling His heart in this visit. For me, to experience

this was a deep confirmation of a realization that was slowly breaking through my American pragmatic materialism – in the vast array of desires that fill our hearts – desires for material things, power, stability, liberty, sex, survival, anything – the fundamental desire, underneath all the noise, residing in the deepest chambers of our heart, is the desire to be loved and to love; and in the end, to be known and loved completely and thoroughly, not because of what we do but despite of it all – to be loved without condition.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chapman Heenan is a Detroit-area native. At 22 years old, he is a seminarian for the Archdiocese of Detroit studying at the Pontifical North American College in Rome. Before graduating with a philosophy degree from Boston College ('10) and beginning seminary in Detroit (Fall 2011), he embarked on a mission with Heart's Home, a French Catholic missionary organization/movement founded in 1990 by a French priest.

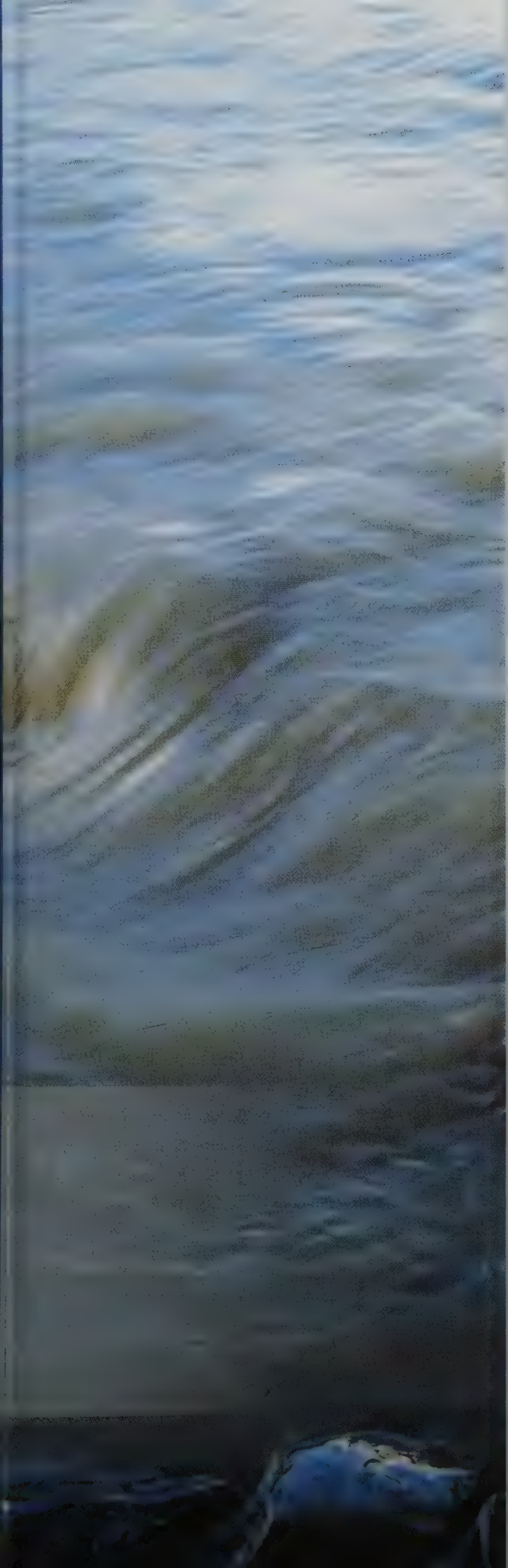
The idea of Heart's Home, with its charism of compassion and the prospect of young adult missionaries of compassion living in community in poor neighborhoods, came to the founder while praying the rosary. He credits Mary to be the founder.



KEEPING MERCY FLOWING

Kevin Tortorelli FILM





INTRODUCTION:

"I am a Franciscan Friar with wide experience of hearing confessions over the past twenty years. The setting has been St. Francis of Assisi Church in midtown Manhattan. For many years people identify us as "the Church behind Gimbels" that hears confessions all day long. Gimbels is no more but its mention reminds us that our ministry of reconciliation has been celebrated on a daily basis for nearly a century. Reconciliation lies deep down at the heart of the Franciscan charism, as well as befriend each other and embrace all creation. Hearing confessions requires stamina. It requires humble, patient and attentive listening. Before heading to your shift it is good to pray, "Lord please don't let me get in your way."

The structure of Confession is simple. You welcome. You listen. You recall that this is not primarily about sin but about God's mercy. You encourage. Sometimes there are tears of joy and peace with a dark past lifted. More often smiles; perhaps even soft laughter. It is the awful humanity of the sacrament that strikes me. Two human beings next to Christ's heart as though adrift on a boundless sea, of immeasurable love. It changes us and makes us merciful in turn. In fact, we become more God-like: "Blessed are the peacemakers; they shall be called sons and daughters of God."

There are also unsettling moments when one senses that something has fizzled, an opportunity rejected, a gnawing emptiness because nothing has changed. The mercy of God seems strangely absent. What happened? Is it my weakness or lack of skill as confessor or the fear or reticence of the penitent? I have tried below to identify some factors I think can block or interrupt the flow of God's mercy and what may be done to unblock it.

THE FLOW OF MERCY CAN BE INTERRUPTED...

...BY LANGUAGE WITHOUT INSIGHT...

An initial obstacle to mercy can sometimes be our very choice of words. We repeat the same old things and that can seem demoralizing: Father, is it the devil or power of sin keeping me stuck, spinning my wheels? I begin to think God has more important things to do than get me out of this lethargy. Maybe God has tried to help me change but by now has given up on me.

As a frequent penitent myself, I understand that repeating the same old things is embarrassing. In my experience of moral defeat I have wrestled unsuccessfully with the Lie and in some disturbing way with the devil as the One in whom there is no truth. With cruel deceit he tells us we suffer because God is angry with our repeated sins and remarkably we are inclined to believe it even though suffering is deeply human and many who suffer are innocent. It is easy enough to swallow the Lie that repeated sins mean God has given up on us. That Lie blocks God's mercy. Dealing effectively with repeated sins requires that I see my sufferings and limitations and failures as held within the suffering of Christ. His love can make the stale, old sin something new and fresh; His love stirs a hope within and taps a reservoir of new perspectives and new insight and energy.

...AND BY LANGUAGE SEPARATED FROM SILENCE...

Words will not always adequately capture the shame, pain and frustration of sin and guilt. Words often tend toward denial or blame. In such cases, we fall back on feelings. Feelings attend my failures. We strain to say what we mean but words fall short and the feelings

seem caught in our throat. But reconciliation depends on words and their power to communicate pain and hear acceptance. Some penitents will say I don't know why I'm here...I can't put anything into words. What I have experienced is beyond words. Father, I don't know how to say it. I don't know how to put it. How does the orphan speak? The abused? The insignificant? The broken? The betrayed? The Spirit of love groans in our hearts with intercession too deep for words. How does the lost child in me speak now that I am an adult? The lost child does not use words; he recalls his feelings and by God's grace they will lead him to a peaceful silence where God dwells. In this silence we feel the Father's welcome. A mother first wipes away tears before inquiring what happened. Mercy does the same.

...BY TRAGEDY...

"I don't trust God." These words are often whispered softly but carefully and deliberately. I was abused as a child. My son died in a motorcycle accident. My wife died of cancer and left me to raise the four children. I don't know where my daughter is. I feel with them the unspoken question: Is God so harsh, His hand so heavy? Some years ago a woman in her 60s sat with me. It had been many years since she had been to church. Her son had died. Without him, she was alone. For years she was convulsed with anger, pity, envy, fear. Yet as she sat with me, recalling those years and their turmoil, she was remarkably peaceful, almost radiant. I could not reconcile her words and her appearance and manner until she laid before me the most extraordinary story. She found herself in a church. She broke down in crushing grief over her dead son and in her heart heard the words "I lost my son too." Looking into my eyes she said this very simply, without emotion. I fought back tears. Those words had penetrated to that awful place where she had lodged her loss and anguish for many years. I found myself repeating the words she heard well up in her heart, 'I lost my son too.' Now I hear

The Spirit of love groans in our hearts with intercession too deep for words. How does the lost child in me speak now that I am an adult? The lost child does not use words; he recalls his feelings and by God's grace they will lead him to a peaceful silence where God dwells. In this silence we feel the Father's welcome. A mother first wipes away tears before inquiring what happened. Mercy does the same.

them too, every time I see the image of the crucified. She told me she tried to comfort the Heavenly Father at that point! She went on to say she spent a long time in silence before the mercy of the cross and in that posture she found healing.

Sadly things don't always end so robustly. There is the ongoing tragedy. 'Father, my Sally is back doing drugs. She was doing well. She would tell me about her plans to finish school and get her own place. I know God will help her.' As I listen and search for an answer to comfort the lady I ask her to think of all the other people in line, all the people worshipping the Lord's presence. Here at St. Francis, mercy takes the form of a community that embraces Sally. Our community is diverse but comes together in its capacity to heal her. Mercy undergirds our community and sustains it. Mercy wants to heal Sally and protect her from harm. Mercy values Sally. She may be just one more drug addict but she is God's daughter and our sister! Mercy knows that the Glory of God is Sally fully alive. The tragedy that can interrupt the flow of mercy is met by the community that reopens the flow of mercy.

...BY EMOTIONS...

It is remarkable how you can sense a strong emotion as though it were borne on a wave. One has to take the initiative and establish a bond: how are you? Humor is helpful, not so much cracking a joke but gentle playfulness in the small tufts of conversation. Something weighs her down, flattens her freedom and lies beyond her control. I fight a tendency to pity her. One listens for loneliness, failure, rejection, the inevitable self-loathing. Sometimes depression has yielded space to envy. "Father, I go to church and say my prayers but I see other people who don't, yet they are doing well." She has met people who have achieved goals that elude her – marriage, children, social standing, success. With envy comes anger and finally shame. Failure is difficult enough but shame by itself can interrupt the flow of mercy because shame says, I am worthless: No one wants me. Not even mercy. An unwelcome silence falls over us. What am I to say?

"What do you enjoy doing?" She may answer cooking or reading or gardening. She is good at these. Suddenly she is more responsive and engaging, sharing more of herself with me. I pick up on these modest fragments – "I'd love to taste that recipe! I enjoy biographies too. I'm trying to improve my green thumb by looking after



a few house plants." She offers some helpful pointers about sun, shade and water. What is happening? The shame, isolation and fear are being called into question before human contact and conversation. I suggest prayer that expresses gratitude for her skills and interests. Perhaps at the heart of such prayer she could jot down the things she enjoys, things she's good at. She may go on to identify someone who would love her recipe for lemon pie or whose single room residence her garden flowers would brighten and cheer. Ideally, with repeated contact she will grow in this direction because the Lord's mercy to her has clarified her own gifts and encouraged new choices.

...BY ADDICTION...

I sometimes experience my own freedom as limping along; "the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak." Without freedom we can easily become locked into routines and habituated to certain behaviors. Commonly, this is what we call addiction. My experience in the confessional suggests that most people in recovery are committed to maintaining their recovery. AA groups meet at all hours. In my present parish my rooms happen to be just over the 'little room'

which hosts self-help meetings daily from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. Many mornings they wake me. Even bitter winter mornings do not affect their commitment. Sometimes in the friary kitchen one can hear through the wall anguished shouts, peals of laughter and the high fives of vigorous applause and encouragement.

Increasingly, however, in the confessional I hear of sexual and internet addiction. As with any addiction, untreated they will interrupt the flow of mercy. Sadly and unwittingly, the confessional structure can enable the addictive behavior to continue. Imagine something like this: a penitent flies to New York on business, visits a 'sex club' and catches the early confessional shift on his way to the airport. The same words in the same order, rote and without emotion: the voice of addiction. What would happen if the confessor suggested counselling or challenged a pattern of behavior? More than a few people spend time online chatting with people half their age. Sometimes, counselling partners with confession in bringing insight and self-understanding. The journey away from the internet can be scary, long and difficult but in the end, counseling helps a person discover mercy. Self-acceptance and the gift of mercy go hand-in-hand. Untreated addictions disconnect mercy and enable the addiction to continue to destroy the addict. Counseling or similar therapy holds out the hope of being freed from addictive behavior. With hope comes mercy that reassures us there is more to life than our addictions. Mercy invites us to a self-acceptance and then goes on to teach us how to show mercy to others.

...BY LACK OF WELCOME...

The experience of mercy and acceptance which we all crave can sometimes be interrupted and hindered by our parish communities! What a tragedy! The chief culprit here is a lack of welcome and hospitality. This is not just bad manners. Welcome is a covenant virtue. Chesed suggests God's favor toward us, His steadfast and welcoming love. Welcoming each other acknowledges that one belongs to the covenant community of the Eucharist. But sadly, welcoming can take a back seat to scapegoating and stigmatizing. You don't quite fit. You don't dress properly or associate with the right people. You're eccentric and old fashioned or you're a tad new age draped out in your Catholic Buddhism. You defy longstanding categories. Mercy is frustrated when it faces these many gaps, a dismemberment of the body of Christ where variety is seen as division.

An example comes to mind. A parishioner prays rather differently. He writes 'letters to God' weekly or even biweekly. He gives them to me as though I were God's mailman. He prints very clearly, often on the back of eviction notices or on 'notice of intention to vacate' forms. He takes advantage of every bit of open space, even writing up along the edges of the paper. In these letters he acknowledges that he is the Father's son in Jesus ('I found the Savior') and that the Father loves him. The Father forgives him. The letters brim with gratitude amid the real setbacks in the author's life. He pours out his heart and entrusts himself, his future, to the Father. He is grateful for real people in his life – 'God please put it into J's heart to go to church.' 'Thank you for Stephen...' he says he's there with you Father!' 'Thanks for my new apartment.' Some letters ache – 'with respect...why won't you bless me? I need to trust more.'

The author asks me to open and read his letters. I do so at my desk. At first I did not welcome his letters. I feared they would be a bit nutty and their author simply unstable. I received them from his hand but my heart was condescending and ungenerous. Very quickly I realized they were not so much his letters to God as God's letters to me, teaching me how to pray through this man and his letters. I felt the sting of my own arrogance. Remarkably these letters never stray from the framework of the Lord's Prayer. In fact they seem to inhale it. They are filled with trust and abandonment to the Father, making petition for the Father's love for us and our neighbors. I do not read them anymore, I pray them – 'Have mercy on me: my heart is troubled.'

I freely acknowledge that unwelcome letters from a marginal man have taught me to pray again. Now when I see him I embrace him and take his letter to my heart. He has taught me to welcome generously the stranger and the "oddball" that mercy may truly flow among and through us.

CONCLUSION:

Though God's mercy is all powerful, nonetheless, God does not force His way into our hearts; He allows us to resist the natural flow of His saving, freeing mercy. We can interrupt the flow by our thought, words and attitudes. We can block the gift and override it by our choice to remain shackled by addictions. We can use language that holds us back from new vision and insight because it fails to be open to the wisdom of the cross. Or we can forget that my language may not be





the penitent's language and I may be "getting through" on some deep level even if I feel I'm not succeeding by my standards and expectations. Mercy can often grow most powerfully in awkward silence and long pauses. In tragedy, mercy can well up within, moving us into conversation with God who has also suffered loss. Mercy finds us a place in a community devoted to our healing.

Emotions, like depression and shame, can be addressed through simple conversation that engages a person's unspoken interests, hidden because depression had obscured them. Mercy allows for a conversation in which, over time, shame, guilt, anger and disappointment can be overcome.

Negative power can take the form of addiction. In the confessional, "easy" mercy might actually be enabling the addiction to continue. Counseling often reconnects the flow of mercy by dismantling the structures of enabling and opening the way to self-acceptance and then openness to Divine self-acceptance.

A final note observed that mercy can be interrupted at the level of the parish. We can marginalize, even scapegoat those who are merely different. We extend them no welcome or greeting. This can be very costly as it takes aim at the least among us with whom Christ identifies. We may come to discover that the least have a gift from the Lord for us, a witness or a grace that challenges and frees us. Welcoming the "stranger"

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

A portrait of a middle-aged man with short, light-colored hair, wearing glasses and a dark jacket. He is smiling broadly, showing his teeth. The background is a plain, light color.

BOOK REVIEW

-Msgr. John Strykowski



MERCY: The Essence of the Gospel and the Key to Christian Life

by Cardinal Walter Kasper

"This book has done me so much good." It is unusual for a Pope to endorse a particular book and it is somewhat unusual for an endorsement to appear on the front of a book jacket. In this instance, however, Cardinal Kasper's book on mercy contains the above endorsement from Pope Francis on the front of the book jacket. The Holy Father's emphasis on mercy has been evident from the beginning of his Pontificate, but it had been part of his ministry before his election. It is obvious, therefore, that he would have found the book congenial to his thinking and spirituality and an even further impetus to his preaching and actions as Bishop of Rome.

Kasper points out that mercy as a divine attribute has traditionally received little attention in the manuals of theology. But the question of who God is has become much more pressing in the light of the great tragedies of the twentieth century, the growing prominence of atheism and secularism, and inter-religious dialogue. For Catholic theology this necessitates a return to the Scriptures and tradition of the Church in order to re-discover the centrality of divine mercy in those sources.

The Old Testament is replete with passages that celebrate and look to God's mercy. Kasper does not shy away from the many passages that speak of God's anger. He defines this anger as "God's resistance to sin and injustice." He insists that "God's being God is revealed in his mercy. Mercy is the expression of his divine essence." Unfortunately, I think that many people still find the image of God as angry dominating their thinking; the challenge to homilists and catechists is to address the need for a fuller, richer image. Kasper does not offer a way to do so except by insisting on the centrality of mercy in the Old Testament. There needs to be a greater recognition that Scriptural references to God's anger are the human attempt within the cultures of the Middle East in the millennia before Christ to explain evil and suffering by attributing them to divine wrath.

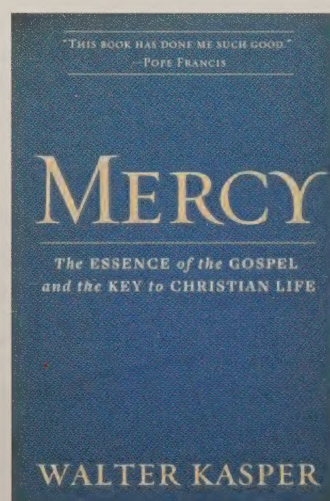
Mercy is at the heart of the message of Jesus. In Luke's Gospel, for example, God "gives gifts in a good, compendious, full, and overflowing measure." God's mercy is, so to speak, superproportional." Chapter IV on Jesus' message is deserving of lengthy meditation because of its beauty and thoroughness. In this chapter, however, Kasper uses a phrase that might be difficult for those not trained in theology – "substitutionary atonement." This phrase expresses the principle that we cannot save ourselves; we need God's intervention. Mercifully He sent His Son to take the burden of our sins, thereby restoring the bond between God and ourselves. By his cross Jesus calls us and enables us to return to the Father.

In Chapter V Kasper relates his findings on mercy in the Scriptures to various theological themes. He insists that God's justice must be seen in the light of God's mercy as the defining attribute to God. In other words, God is just (most true to himself and to us) when he is merciful. This is a somewhat different approach from Pope Benedict XVI in his encyclical *Deus caritas est* when he wrote that God's forgiving love "is so great that it turns God against himself, his love against his justice." Kasper does not see God's mercy and love in conflict with God's justice. Rather God's justice is mercy. That does not mean, as he points out several times, that we simply have a "nice God." We remain accountable to God precisely in terms of how we respond to God's mercy and become instruments of his mercy for others. Entering into a contemporary debate as to whether all human beings will in the end be saved, Kasper says that we cannot answer that question because we do not know the depths of the human heart and the potential for the denial of God's mercy.

In the light of immense human suffering in the last century and the present one as well, theologians have asked whether we can speak of God suffering with us. He cites a wonderful distinction from Bernard of Clairvaux: God cannot suffer in Himself (in His own being), but he can share in the suffering of others. Kasper writes that "in his mercy, God allows himself, in sovereign freedom, to be affected by pain and suffering." The Death and Resurrection of Jesus reveal that God in his mercy and power overcomes evil and death itself.

Kasper addresses the painful question of the suffering of innocent people. After examining several philosophical attempts to answer the question, he turns to the conclusion of the Book of Job, where he is confronted, overwhelmed and consoled by the ever creative power and presence of the mystery of God. "God's wisdom proves to be too great for fitting into some human schema." Driven by the light of the resurrection of Jesus, the innocent one who triumphs over evil, we become God's response to innocent suffering by our engagement in the works of mercy.

Chapter VI is dedicated precisely to the Christian's and the entire Church's commitment to living with mercy at the center of existence and action. "In our acts of mercy, our neighbor experiences something of the miracle of God's royal dominion, which begins to dawn secretly." In reminding us of the presence of the poor in Christ, he quotes a splendid prayer from Mother Teresa, one of whose petitions was: "Even if you hide in the inconspicuous disguise of an irascible, demanding, or intransigent person, may I recognize you and say: 'Jesus, my patient, how good it is to serve you.'"



Just as Jesus lived completely for others, so too the Christian and the Church must be "pro-existent." To live for others means not only to serve them but also to bear their sufferings and even the spiritual darkness that might entail.

Chapter VII describes the Church as a sacrament of mercy, a community where mercy is primary in proclamation and action. "As preachers, we will only reach the hearts of our hearers when we...help them to discover the merciful God in their own life story." A model of this is St. Augustine: "If one looked at his earlier life, Augustine would not have made it even to the level of a head acolyte, according to today's criteria for episcopal appointments." Kasper highlights the importance of a dialogical style in the Church as a form of mercy. The Church's works

of mercy are what please God most. He quotes St. John Chrysostom: "God has no need of golden chalices, but of golden souls."

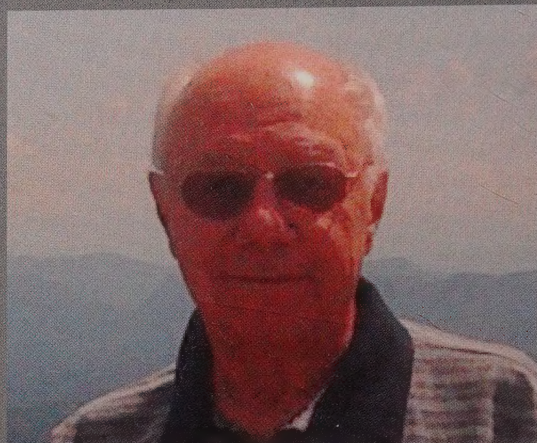
Kasper also urges the primacy of mercy in the drawing up and execution of Canon Law.

Chapter VIII recognizes the work of the state is responding to the needs of its people, but also acknowledges the limitations of bureaucratic action. Thus the culture of a society must be imbued with the spirit and deeds of mercy by its members. But without the acknowledgment of the existence of a merciful God, good deeds remain ungrounded in the recognition of the ultimate dignity of every human being. It is that God-given dignity that is the most powerful and effective motive for compassionate care of others. Kasper also praises the grounding of the social teaching of the Church in divine love by Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI.

Chapter IX is dedicated to Mary as Mother of Mercy and it too can serve as a wellspring of Mariology and Marian devotion today. Indeed, what can be said about the entire book is that it can be a source of renewal for theology, action, and personal conversion today. It is perhaps one of the most important books that a Catholic, especially one involved in ministry, can read today. It is not simply a ground-breaking treatise of theology, but also spiritual reading enabling us to rejoice in the extraordinary gifts of God's mercy and forcing us to examine our personal and ecclesial consciences on our attitudes, habits and deeds of mercy.

It is also a book that helps us to understand this extraordinary moment of Church history. God's mercy has given us a Bishop of Rome from a distant country who with courage and determination has forced us to look beyond ourselves and to search out those on the peripheries. Kasper helps us to understand what motivates Pope Francis. This book should be mandatory reading in seminaries, novitiates, formation programs for lay ecclesial ministers, and ongoing formation. It should re-focus scholarly work on the history of mercy in the Scriptures, the tradition of the Church, and the development of apostolic movements.

Most of all, however, each one of us should be able to say: "This book has done me so much good."



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ordained a priest in Rome December 18, 1963 for the Diocese of Brooklyn, New York, Msgr. Strykowski has served in diverse ministerial settings over the decades – Associate Pastor St. John Cantius, Brooklyn; graduate studies in Rome for his S.T.D. in Dogmatic Theology; service to the Roman Curia in the English Section of the Secretariat of State and in the Congregation of Bishops.

During those years he was an adjunct professor at the Gregorian University and Spiritual Director at North American College. He has served as Professor of Theology and Rector of Immaculate Conception Seminary, Huntington, NY and Pastor of Holy Cross Parish in Maspeth.

He has worked at the USCCB in the Office of Campus Ministry and the Office for Doctrine. He also served as Rector of St. James Pro-Cathedral in Brooklyn.

Retired February 1, 2015, Msgr. Strykowski continues to offer priests' retreats and workshops throughout the country.

A TRANSFORMED BUILDING, TRANSFORMED HEARTS

Brother Francis Boylan, CSC



In 2001, the family of Holy Cross Services accepted the challenge to convert the former Mercy Hospital on Detroit's east side into a "one stop" community resource center. The renamed "Samaritan Center" was designed to be a hub of educational, health, employment training and social support services for individuals

and families living below the poverty line. The transformation of the building was just the beginning; the "real story" is the transformation of lives. Little did we realize how appropriate the name chosen was for our transformed setting: Samaritan Center.

No less than 70 organizations partner to assist 1,500 individuals who come through the doors of Samaritan each day. Services are provided with compassion and receivers are welcomed in a gracious manner. Perhaps more importantly, these services are also received with joy and gratitude such that both givers and receivers feel renewed. We are all "good" Samaritans with aid to offer and in some way we all have scars, needing healing and hope.

The evidence of the power of mercy and hope can be seen in the smiling faces of those who leave with new clothes, diplomas, opportunities for employment, restored family relationships or improved health. "Providers" are also transformed by the encounter, humbled that God used them and grateful for friendships that gradually develop.

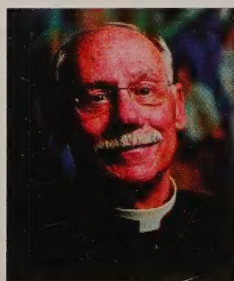
As he inaugurated a "Year of Mercy," Pope Francis has encouraged us to be touched and transformed by the Lord's mercy. But being transformed—changed—requires courage. It can be painful. At Samaritan, we often encounter individuals who struggle to believe they are worthy of God's grace. We the providers assure our visitors that God loves them and that we love them. And their humble presence

visibly and tangibly reminds us that we too need mercy, acceptance and healing. Christ is experienced precisely in the "give-and-take" of Samaritan.

Our clients are messengers of God to us and we tell them "We are blessed by your presence. You awaken us to the often harsh realities of life from which we sometimes shield ourselves. By meeting you, we are indeed changed. Hopefully we will be able to help you experience some awakening and change as well."

In reality, we are forming a "family," a home where givers and receivers feel mutually welcomed and appreciated. In fact, we could say that all of us at Samaritan – givers and receivers – become the "inn" or "hotel" where the Good Samaritan took his new friend, discovered on the roadside of life.

The Samaritan became "good" by his charity and by accepting that charity, the "victim" became healthy and moved the Samaritan to deeper spiritual insight, growth and sensitivity. The story and parable goes on. Everywhere and everyone can be "Samaritan."



Br. Francis Boylan, CSC has served as Executive Director/President of Holy Cross Children's Services for more than 40 years. He is a member of the Congregation of Holy Cross, holds a Bachelors of Science from St. Edward's University and a Masters of Social Work from

University of Michigan. He holds a Clinical and Macro license through the State of Michigan Department of Community Health Board of Social Work. Br. Francis is a member of the Knights of Columbus, Legatus (national organization of Catholic executives) and the Equestrian Order of Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem. He has received many awards in response to his efforts on behalf of children and families.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Guest House

All Soul's Mass and Luncheon

November 2, 2015

Scripps Mansion, Lake Orion, MI

Icon Dei of Guest House

The Christmas Market

November 7, 2015

The San Marino Club

Troy, MI

Guest House

Advent Evening of Reflection

Scripps Mansion

Lake Orion, MI

December 3, 2015

Tell us about your organization's events and we will share them on this page. Please e-mail them to editor@hdmag.org

Guest House

Alumni Winter Seminar

January 11-14, 2016

DiamondHead Resort

Fort Myers Beach, FL

Guest House

Alumnae Winter Retreat

January 14-17, 2016

DiamondHead Resort

Fort Myers Beach, FL

Guest House

Men's Retreat

April 4-7, 2016

Scripps Mansion, Lake Orion, MI

Guest House

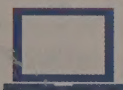
Summer Leadership Conference

July 11-13, 2016

Chicago Marriott Naperville Hotel

Naperville, IL

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